

HERACLITUS–NIMIS OBSCURĒ



**HERACLITUS**  
**NIMIS OBSCURĒ**

**ROSS COBURN**

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Ross Coburn

## DEDICATION

*This book is dedicated to Rasmus Nørgaard Nielsen,  
with love, for his years of support and encouragement, and  
for being there for me when nobody else was.*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to thank Randy Hoyt for sharing his Heraclitus Fragments with me. Without them, his translation work and insightful comments, much of this book would not have been possible.

Any observations couched in the translated quotes of the Fragments are his.

[Heraclitus – The Fragments](http://heraclitusFragments.com) can be found on the web at <http://heraclitusFragments.com>.

## FOUR WORDS

*αλληγορία* – Allegory, or Metaphor.

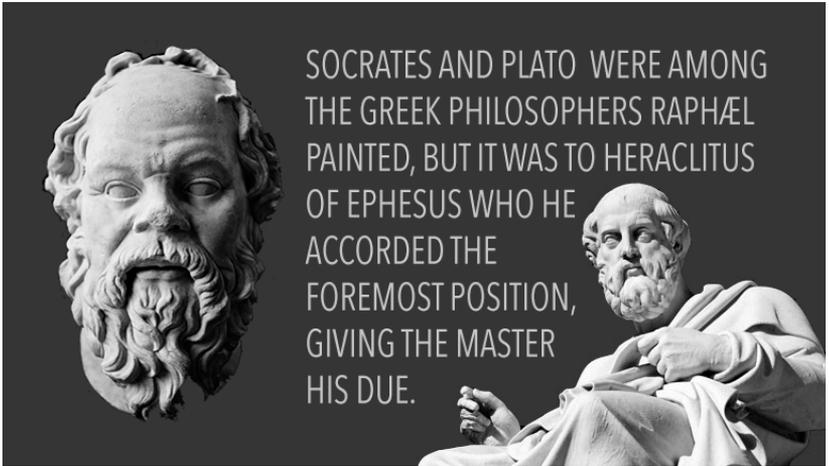
*γνώσεις* – Knowledge.

*αντίληψη* – Perception, or Understanding.

*σοφία* – Wisdom.

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**1****INTRODUCTION**

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*Heraclitus was the first of those four Ancient Greek philosophers whom Western tradition has accorded the only places at their table, which has been labeled λόγος, or Lógos, Reason, whatever else may be representative to the academic mind as being their contribution to modern Western thought and ways of knowing.*

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Without claiming it to be the sole or definitive resource on the subject material, I am confident that both scholars and casual readers alike may find this effort to be a

consistent and compelling perspective on the words and the intent behind them of Heraclitus of Ephesus' surviving, tragically incomplete but seminal work *On Nature*, offering insights into what has thus far been deemed to be 'obscure' by scholars for centuries, even millennia, which have yet, to the best of my knowledge, to be considered in this light.

In this exposition, I have followed where Heraclitus' words led me, relying on my grasp of metaphor, coupled with my familiarity with, and understanding of the culture and period, as well as its myths and legends. Over the course of my exploration of the Fragments, certain themes emerged, and I organized the following chapters of this book accordingly.

What I determined to avoid at all cost is the temptation to force anything. If my efforts at understanding Heraclitus' words failed, as they occasionally did, I remarked upon it accordingly and grouped those failures to parse in their own chapter for completeness' sake.

And so, I will proceed, beginning with a brief introduction of Heraclitus of Ephesus, placing him among his peers, before moving on to addressing his Fragments.

Heraclitus was the first of those four Ancient Greek philosophers whom Western tradition has accorded the only places at their table, which has been labeled λόγος, or Lógos, Reason, whatever else may be representative to the academic mind as being their contribution to modern Western thought and ways of knowing.

Yet while the other three guests so seated may need no introductions, their names – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – serving admirably to establish their credentials, it is the host of this banquet, Heraclitus, whose place at this table is held to be most tenuous, owing principally to this ‘obscure’ man’s having coined that term, λόγος, in its significant sense, but otherwise failed to yield his innermost thoughts, and with them the value of his own contributions as to how and why we now hold ourselves to be in any way wise, learned, or authoritative, as having voices worthy of commanding the respect of our fellows.

If the reader will indulge me, I shall attempt to offer that fresh perspective, and explain why and how I find myself weighted down by the unenviable task of, uneducated and unaccomplished in conventional studies as I am, attempting to reach the attention of and persuade those who have followed the Platonic model to achieve their own scholarly accomplishments and recognition. In this, at least, I am confident that, if accorded an audience, I can rely on the consistency and cultural resonance of my insights, but that the most persuasive argument I can present comes in the form of that seminal thinker Socrates' reflecting these concepts and aims in his own body of work, as becomes increasingly, even astonishingly evident when one considers his words in light of this new context. The man even makes repeated, not at all veiled references to Heraclitus, or his book, that become apparent as soon as the possible link between the two is considered.

When we examine those four Ancient Greeks, and specifically their having, or failed to have grasped Heraclitus' wisdom, Aristotle, who also happens to be the

furthest removed, chronologically, from Heraclitus' days and was a relatively callow twenty–eight years old when On Nature was partially lost, retains his place and dignities, well beyond the scope of my understanding, by dint of his declining to engage Heraclitus' word–play, instead striking out to carve his own, indelible path. He and I are quite comfortably represented as we are and have been, which is to say all due respect to him.

It's the others whose company I presume to join for the purpose of this essay. Whether hubris, a failure to reason, or having something of relevance to contribute is ultimately up to the reader to decide.

Plato, who as I will soon suggest failed at every turn, save perhaps one unexpected flash of insight, to grasp what Heraclitus (and later Socrates) would not say, but rather left clues for their audience to grasp and, if they managed it, make the intuitive leap necessary to finding the mindset required to understand Heraclitus.

And then Socrates, who now so obviously both grasped Heraclitus' teachings, not only embracing them, but

incorporating them into his own philosophy and methodology.

The principle difference between them being that Heraclitus was a writer, and Socrates a speaker, thus each tailored their message to the requirements of the medium by which they expressed their teachings.



## 2

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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*John Lennon was a given, though his failings as a parent, coupled with the apparent contradiction between his peace and love philosophy and his misanthropic nature, though I came to understand the latter..*

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While I am aware that an author's biography is typically placed at the back of the book, my circumstances, and the nature of this work suggest that I am best served, and best serve my readers by introducing myself first, as addressing

the elephants in the room may serve to both temper expectations while addressing those issues most likely, I imagine, to be raised by an academic mind.

As to my own credentials, or lack thereof, particularly regarding my qualifications to assess these historic figures, such great minds, I will for the moment only attest that I have come upon any intellectual accomplishments honestly, if not easily, as the result of years' efforts often spent wondering what, if anything, I hoped to achieve by shunning any semblance of a formal education in favor of, as I came to think of it, building my own mind, a process that often left me stumbling about, grasping at even the faintest glimmers of illumination, while trying both to understand these glimpses of greater meaning and weaving them into anything resembling a coherent narrative.

I had always, from my earliest days in elementary school, prodded by what I can now see was a combination of my neuro-atypical and hyperlexic mind resisting any and all efforts to tell me what, how, who or when to learn, when books had always been my greatest source of joy, and the

not illogical reaction to being pretty much tortured by my schoolmates for being obviously, physically different. I say this with no hint of lingering resentment – children are inherently, but innocently cruel. While the parents and teachers were seemingly unaware, or worse, indifferent to my plight, it would have been odd, not to mention self-destructive if I hadn't tried every trick in the book to avoid school, perfectly happy to read at home, or anywhere else.

I had acquired a love of books and learning from my mother at a very young age, and she encouraged me fully, even dropping my also hyperactive little self off at the local public library for hours at a time (it was the seventies, things were different then) and I had the librarians, who were likely charmed at my childish enthusiasm, to keep me safe, even as the subject matter I pursued was more than once remarked upon.

As a four year-old, or five, or I don't have any real idea, I pursued dinosaurs, of course! Also space and the planets, and more or less whatever National Geographic might have to offer. The only real difference between me and any other

kids present being that when I picked a book about dinosaurs, having long since exhausted the children's picture books, I chose hefty tomes by the like of Bob Horner.

That said, I assure the reader that while my ability to read was rather advanced, my maturity was entirely typical of my age, and so I'd be flipping through those adult volumes, largely in search of the next picture, or a description of a new, or familiar, species. While I did absorb more than that, it was entirely at random. For example, I assure you that in my mind, Montana, Alberta and China were nebulous places where dinosaurs were, and if asked to draw my own map of the world, they would be adjacent, somewhere Not In Dorval, the suburb of Montreal in which I grew up.

And I could do all this reading and learning away from school, with its shaming and beatings, so I did. I could already read and write, in any event, so there wasn't a whole lot I felt I might be missing there.

It's a uniquely uncomfortable experience to look about as classmates, who you desperately wanted to fit in with,

struggled forming letters, then words, while thinking, and here I am approximating what I remember feeling, but not fully understanding, “They hurt me and shun me, but are functionally retarded, still working on spelling, I see? How many weeks has it been? Is it ever going to end?”

And so I took every opportunity I could to drop out. My truancy rate was likely legendary, at any rate.

My hands–on approach and efforts resulted in mixed returns through high school, which was not a happy time for me either, being somehow even more of a social outcast than I had been, though once I was transferred to a so–called school for the gifted I did make a few friends, most of whom have long since been forgotten, and a few acquaintances who, much to my surprise in recent years, have blossomed into friendships.

What I didn’t take from this experience was any greater appreciation for being indoctrinated, and I declined to graduate accordingly. I was certain by then that further academic progress was unlikely, but I did eventually come around to attempting CEGEP, a two–year program

intended to prepare Quebec students for university life, academically equivalent to Grades 12 and 13, albeit possibly providing a greater range of choices where course material is concerned.

In short, it wasn't significantly more attractive to me over all, though I did enjoy the courses focusing on Communications Studies taught by Thomas Fischer and Chandra Prakash, the former having turned me on to media studies while the latter first planted the notion in my brain that thought and language are intimately related, to the extent that it might be impossible to achieve the former without grasping the latter.

What I did take from my brief time at Vanier College, through my involvement with the school newspaper, of which I found myself Editor-in-Chief, was my introduction to Macintosh, and subsequently the Internet, which changed my life in ways that took me years of experimenting and self-reflection to fully appreciate.

I realized immediately, however, that my Macintosh offered an experience unlike any other available to me and

that, coupled with Internet access, even in 1992, long before Google made searching the web easy and intuitive, I had found a limitless source of learning and even socializing, both particularly suited to my talents, limitations, and sensibilities.

I had been using a computer, an X86 PC clone with a monochrome amber monitor and a 1,200 baud modem, to participate in online communities, specifically WWIVnet-based bulletin board systems, since 1986, but if I had been forced to continue to subject myself to the garish, disorganized, unreliable and just plain ugly environment that was Windows 3.11, I have little doubt that I would have given up, such was the assault it represented to my sense of how things should work, to say nothing of my, I like to think, somewhat refined sensibilities.

Macintosh, by contrast, was and remains elegant, simple, intuitive, and beautifully executed. The interface was soothing to my frayed nerves, and what's more, whenever I logged in I was greeted by a friendly, cheerful face welcoming me. That little 'happy Mac' pinged closer to

human to me than most of the people who surrounded me during these and subsequent miserable, lonely years.

And so I began to learn at an accelerated rate, having the web at my fingertips, for better and occasionally, it must be admitted, worse. I learned about a great many topics, some shallowly, others in considerable depth, still part of my awareness to this day.

One constant from 1992 on was that I learned how to learn. I learned what did and didn't work for me, and I learned not to trust any source blindly, but rather to evaluate it for myself, as well as researching what others had to say on the matter. But still, while I intuited that I was making progress, and that what I was doing was important to me even if I didn't fully understand why, it wasn't enough. I wasn't getting anywhere in life, while employed in a series of increasingly challenging IT positions, and it frustrated me, even as I was becoming ever more disillusioned with the people and the world around me.

Nothing made sense. I was continually alienating, or being rejected by people for reason I couldn't understand,

and still don't, though I may now have a label for my difficulties: I was eventually diagnosed as being autistic, well into my fifth decade, by which point there wasn't much to be done about it, but it was good to know, I suppose.

Have I mentioned being a bit of a Macintosh person? Well, in 1997 that affinity would, embarrassingly, be both the impetus for me to, as I have come to think of it, build my own mind, and the source material for the inspiration I drew upon in going about it.

That would be Apple's Think Different ad campaign. The combination of Macintosh, the theme of the campaign and the seminal figures it presented in poster form was an irresistible draw to me and, troubled as I was at the time by the apparent disconnect between what people expressed as values and what I saw around me not matching those notions in any way had me casting about for some sense of certainty and security. I was also determined to, as I thought of it at the time, 'build my own mind', my own ways of understanding, my own morals and ethics, and so I took Think Different literally, adopting it as a personal mantra,

and spent a few very difficult years going about doing so, with a great deal of trial and failure involved throughout.

I chose a number of the campaign's subjects as the focus of my efforts to understand, both them and myself, particularly with regards to becoming a better human being. I was very selective, and carefully considered any perceived character flaws my idols displayed, as well as their more salient qualities.

John Lennon was a given, though his failings as a parent, coupled with the apparent contradiction between his peace and love philosophy and his seemingly misanthropic nature, though I came in time to better understand the latter and excused the former on the grounds that I was unlikely to have children.

Albert Einstein, too, was a first choice, and in studying him further, I came to an even greater appreciation of his mind, as expressed by his values and gentle nature. I confess,  $E=MC^2$  was, to my mind, the least of his accomplishments.

Muhammad Ali? Initially I was merely curious as to what a boxer was doing in the company of such great thinkers, and exemplars of the human spirit. I started looking deeper, and had the opportunity to speak with people who grew up around him, or for whom he meant everything. Needless to say, my curiosity was more than satisfied, and I chose him as one of my role models.

In short, I did come to build my own ways of understanding, and knowing, as well as honing my critical thinking skills and a certain, I hope healthy, skepticism concerning first impressions and media agendas.

This was the skill set I have attempted to further hone, and which I think served me well, until the rather surreal day that I tripped over Heraclitus of Ephesus.

This happened in Autumn, 2013, following a particularly significant instance of self-understanding which led me to feel that I was finally ready to tackle the Greeks.

I had, you see, avoided them until that point with a very much superstitious awe. Whatever else I'd explored, my

inner voice had always whispered to me that should I go there and founder, then everything I'd built for myself, and all of my self-respect would crumble, and so I'd kept a respectful distance, even though I'd immersed myself in Greek mythology and storytelling from an early age.

But the time had come, and so I approached these Greek philosophers in the manner I had become accustomed to employing when wanting to learn. I first visited Wikipedia, which I in no way recommend as a definitive source on any topic, but which has served me well as a starting point, to gain an overview of sorts, collecting terms and topics for later, more serious perusal.

I'd decided to begin by looking up the Greek term for 'reason', thinking it would make a good introduction to the subject of philosophy, particularly as espoused by the likes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. And it did prove to be a highly relevant starting point

Λόγος, Lógos, or Reason was, as I suspected, a very relevant starting point, and as I scanned the Wikipedia article devoted to it, I noted that it had first been coined, in

its philosophically significant sense, by one Heraclitus of Ephesus. Curious, I clicked on the hyperlink leading to his biography, and lazily went about absorbing the first preamble, before being presented with some of his most famous words.

Which I parsed without difficulty, mentally nodding in agreement, and continued reading, only to be left bewildered by the news that those words were in any way obscure, much less that they had somehow remained impenetrable for some twenty–five hundred years.

After a moment of, ironically enough, severe Cognitive Dissonance, I re–read him, and found that he remained entirely understandable. In fact, I hadn't performed any impressive feat of reasoning by deciphering him, I'd simply recognized myself, albeit expressed using different metaphors. He was saying, as clear as day to me, some of the same things I had been going on about for more than a decade.

Naturally, my first instinct was to suspect that this represented some sort of colossal failure to reason on my

part, and so I proceeded to dig deeper, settling on *The Heraclitus Fragments*, a complete collection of his remaining words, in the original Greek with translations offered by Randy Hoyt, who very generously permitted me to reproduce his work in the body of this book.

What I found continued to prove eminently even stubbornly comprehensible, though not everything Heraclitus expressed had as yet made its way into my own thinking. But having a notion as to what he was up to, obtained by considering his famous river metaphor, coupled with a firm grasp of ancient Greek mythology and legends, led me, eventually, to what I firmly believe to be the complete, coherent, and I think compelling exposition of the man, his methods and teachings, which I offer in the pages to follow.

In doing so, I am not so much arguing my positions as I am presenting them and letting the reader reach their own conclusions. If it is as clear and definitive as I believe it to be, as well as being, much to my surprise, supported by and reflected in the teachings of Socrates, who at this point I had

not yet read, then no further persuasion is required on my part.

I offer my interpretations and such insights as I may possess in the hopes that greater minds than mine, and more eloquent voices, will take up the study of Heraclitus' teachings and methods and appreciate their immense value, as he remains as relevant as ever, particularly on such topics as the usefulness and limitations of knowledge, of the importance of understanding where knowledge fails us, or even becomes dangerous, and touching on such related topics as prejudice, ways of learning, methods of teaching vs. being educated, and the importance of self-understanding, and with it a greater understanding of those around us.

If I am honest, I would much rather some Harvard or Oxford PhD have been responsible for lifting the veil of obscurity surrounding the Weeping Sage, but as it stands the old Greek is stuck with me. Hopefully, that will not long remain the case, and in time, and upon further study,

perhaps he will finally take his place at the head of the Ancient Greek Philosophers' table.

As for me, I just hope these words get read.



### 3

## LIFE AND TIMES

Before delving into his methods and teachings, the reader should know something of the man, and his circumstances, as these factors obviously influenced his development as a thinker and informed on the sort of resources he had available to him, and which in turn naturally shaped the ways in which he wrote his narrative.

I have consciously avoided reading others' thoughts concerning the Weeping Sage, as I have those who write

about Michelangelo, another historical figure who I revere and believe I have insights of value to share concerning.

I do this as part of my way of learning, which is to approach a topic or personality with as much of a blank slate as possible, so that whatever impressions I receive are as purely mine, if not necessarily unique (how would I know?) as possible and to keep from being, consciously or otherwise, biased in some way by the opinions and, frankly, the likelihood that mistaken conclusions are on occasion formed by others, nobody being perfect.

I stick strictly to the facts, the words of the person in question, rarely accommodating the opinions of their contemporaries with more than a pinch of salt and, of course, studying their works, as extensively and thoroughly as my circumstances permit.

Only once I've reached whatever insights I may have gleaned on the subject matter, I slowly broaden my research to incorporate the opinions of others, though I still tend to shy away from all but the most authoritative or, in my eyes, trustworthy of sources. For example, when I am delving into

the lives and minds of Albert Einstein or Steve Jobs, I have come to trust Walter Isaacson implicitly but would hesitate to accord a writer with whom I am less familiar the same level of trust.

Eventually, however, I reach a point, or at least I have done so with Heraclitus, where I feel that I've pretty much tapped out whatever veins of personal insights I've been mining, and that my understanding of them, at least as relates to the nature of my inquiries, is sufficiently established that I am not putting myself at risk of being muddled by the opinions of others, and can indulge my curiosity and begin learning what else has been said, or written.

While I suspect I may never get that familiar with *Il Divino*, I have reached the point that, regarding Heraclitus, I have as thorough an understanding of him as I am likely ever to earn on my own, and other voices can only add to my store of information and provide context, be it cultural or historical, that I may lack.

The short biography which follows has been gleaned largely from public sources. In part due to my limited resources, although I would certainly find a way to afford any significant material on a subject I am so deeply invested in, but also to try and avoid unwitting acts of plagiarism.

The available sources all seem to agree that Heraclitus was born into the upper class of his native Ephesus, then part of the Persian Empire, situated on the Ionian coast, home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Which to me implies that he not only had the opportunity to benefit from the best of educations, but that he was also likely involved in the armed defence of the city as a young man.

That he was perhaps dismissive of many of his potential teachers seems likely, given the tone he adopts when referring to many, if not all, of those who may have instructed him, including no less a figure than Pythagoras, about who we will see he has a good deal to say, not much of it flattering.

Yet he also speaks highly of one Bias, son of Teutamias, of Priene, who my sources list, alongside Pythagoras, as having influenced young Heraclitus. In the latter's case, my admittedly preliminary research has revealed that his own teachings addressed many of the topics that Heraclitus would later form his own, often startlingly original philosophies concerning, and so it is likely that Heraclitus, when asked as to the source of his wisdom, was not being entirely truthful when he replied 'I searched myself'.

I have also read that Heraclitus may have been the heir to the Ephesian rulership, but that he abdicated in order to pursue his inquiries.

Whatever the truth of these matters, it seems clear that he was a strong proponent of the rule of law, of martial accomplishment, and even of the desirability and necessity of war as an agent of social change, as well as a crucible in which individual excellence might be forged.

Indeed, he was an ardent believer in change, or flux, as he most commonly phrased it, believing that strife was the key to humanity's advancement.

He was similarly, perhaps most notably of the mindset that there exists an underlying truth common to all, but perceived by only a select few, and that Wisdom lay in perceiving it, and acting according to it.

He was, if not completely dismissive of the value of knowledge, in its place, himself being an enthusiastic astronomer, for one, certainly of the opinion that while the learning of many things was required of those who would seek wisdom, that chasing knowledge for its own sake was not a worthy pastime, and that rather understanding, of oneself, of ones' fellows and of the natural world around us was the desired attitude.

What has not been addressed by other scholars, to the extent of my limited awareness, is his perhaps unique belief that man existed in three stages: Childhood, adulthood and, for those who achieved a measure of Wisdom, godhood, which he did not confuse with literal immortality. It is to the seeking and teaching of this greatest Wisdom that he appears to have devoted himself.

Finally, he had an undeniably and, to the author at least, somewhat impenetrable mystical side to his beliefs, revolving around the notions of the characteristics of, and interactions between Fire, Earth, Air and Water.

# Λόγος Lógos Reason

4

## Λόγος, Lógos, Reason

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*Heraclitus is speaking of the phenomenon in which people prove unable to comprehend a truth when confronted with it if it clashes with their own closely-held beliefs or convictions.*

---

This Lógos holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For though all things come to be in accordance with

this Lógos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B1

For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the Lógos is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B2

Listening not to me but to the Lógos it is wise to agree that all things are one.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B50

I have presented those three quoted Fragments as I was first exposed to them, in that infamous Wikipedia entry on Heraclitus, and will address them together, providing the reader with what I recognized as being in harmony with my own thoughts before undertaking a more extensive and

detailed examination of the rest of the Heraclitus Fragments, arranged not in numerical order, but rather divided into sections, each one devoted to one of the Weeping Sage's lessons, or themes.

I would first, however, beg the readers' indulgence as I relate how I came to be exposed to Heraclitus, and in so doing recognized myself.

I have made mention of not having been successfully educated, and to have made considerable efforts to learn on my own terms, using such tools as I possessed innately, had developed through practice, or was provided by my introduction to the personal computer and the networking thereof, first in 1986, participating in BBSing, or bulletin board networks, principally WWIVnet for those who, like me, are relative dinosaurs where the popular spread of computer technology is concerned, and more significantly in 1992, when I acquired my first Macintosh and with it, my first Internet access account.

This changed my life, allowing me as it did, even in the wild and woolly days before Google made searching the web

so very much easier, to see beyond my immediate surroundings, and to profit from the thoughts and words of people from every corner of the globe, and representing any number of cultures and beliefs.

It was the beginning of a process that would culminate, in the latter part of 1997, with me deciding to build my own mind.

Embarrassingly, I was inspired to do so by Apple's Think Different campaign and iconography, which I even embraced as my guiding motto and from the figures celebrated therein I chose, with careful and often painful consideration and self-evaluation, the personalities who would serve as my role models, for better or worse, as I went about my exercise in self-understanding.

One notable gap in my learning, however, was and had always been the Ancient Greek philosophers. Oh, I devoured their mythology and stories as a child, but I always shied away from their great thinkers, with a superstitious awe, fearing that, if I were to venture into those waters and

flounder, that it would be the end of me, and my efforts to live and learn on my own terms.

It wasn't until late 2013 when, after a fairly significant period of personal growth, albeit coupled with a great deal of potential self-harm as well, that I finally felt that I had reached the point in my understanding of myself, and the way my mind worked, that it was safe, and indeed long past time for me to delve into the Ancient Greeks.

Rather than grabbing the first copy of Plato I could lay my hands on, however, I decided to do a little preliminary research. By which I mean familiarizing myself with the landscape. I decided that 'reason' was a good place to start, so I proceeded to look it up. On Wikipedia.

I know, I know. Wikipedia is not the place to go if one is serious about delving into a topic, but I have usually found that it can serve as a useful quick-reference tool with which to gather a list of subjects to then study in earnest.

I found λόγος, or λόγος; Reason, quickly enough, and with it the mention that the term, in the sense that the

Ancient Greeks of note used it, was first coined by one Heraclitus of Ephesus, whom I'd never heard of before.

So, being easily distracted and admittedly curious, I clicked on the hyperlink bringing up his own entry, and was presented with the material quoted at the beginning of this section. And, as mentioned, I was able to parse it without difficulty, recognizing as I did my own thoughts on a matter of great import to me, albeit phrased more eloquently than my own head–ass infarction model.

And so, having followed him without any kind of difficulty, I was then thrown for a loop when the article went on to mention that:

What Lógos means here is not certain: it may mean 'reason' or 'explanation' in the sense of an objective cosmic law; or it may signify nothing more than 'saying' or 'wisdom'. Yet, an independent existence of a universal Lógos was clearly suggested by Heraclitus.

–Wikipedia entry on Heraclitus, late 2013.

Once I'd recovered from a moment spent seriously questioning whether I'd read that correctly, I picked myself up and determined to look into this in considerably greater detail.

More on that later. On to the quotes in question, and their meaning.

This Lógos holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For though all things come to be in accordance with this Lógos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep.

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For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the Lógos is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B2

Listening not to me but to the Lógos it is wise to agree that all things are one.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B50

Heraclitus is speaking of the phenomenon in which people prove unable to comprehend a truth when confronted with it if it clashes with their own closely-held beliefs or convictions. If, in short, what they think they know is in conflict with what they see, or otherwise experience, they have something like an instant's mental breakdown, and the truth in question fails to register.

This is not the same thing as merely disagreeing with this new information. It is the inability to engage with it, and subsequently an inability to begin to understand it, regardless of how true, and how self-evident it may be.

A favourite example of mine is the Vatican. History informs, and more recent events further reinforce the simple, if appalling and tragic truth that the head of the

Catholic Church has overseen a never-ending series of crimes against humanity, including the Catholic faithful.

Persecution, including but not limited to the torture, excommunication, even murder of those whose thoughts and words were in any way critical of the Pope and his lackeys.

Hypocrisy, which is the abuse of spiritual authority to take advantage of those who place their faith in the person and institution in question, with Pontiffs, particularly the Borgias and de Medici, maintaining mistresses, hoarding wealth, peddling influence, interfering with the politics of sovereign nations.

More recently, the revelation that the Vatican Bank has been used as a money-laundering front for such organizations as the Italian Mafia, corruption so extensive that Europe's banks refused to have any further business dealings with the Catholic bank.

Taking advantage of the tax-exempt status granted to religious organizations to engage in real estate purchases

on a global scale with, for example, the Vatican reportedly being the single largest landlord in New York City.

And of course, and most appalling among their recent crimes, the practice of protecting pedophile priests by shifting them from one parish to another, interfering with attempts by civil authorities to investigate and punish them, while simultaneously engaging in such fiscal shenanigans as moving money out of the parishes where these crimes against children took place, in order to thwart any victims' efforts to seek some measure of compensation by suing the Catholic Church. All this while purportedly selectively paying off certain victims and their families in order to ensure their silence and so protect the Vatican's reputation.

These acts, and many more besides, are not news. They are a matter of public record, and so available to any Catholics who might care to know what their faith's so-called shepherds are up to.

The notion of a Catholic priest as a sexual predator is so widespread that it has become one of the primary

stereotypes associated with the church and its representatives.

And yet many, indeed seemingly the overwhelming majority of Catholics, who can be moral, ethical people, though of course as with any group, the truth is that the whole range of human behaviour is represented among its ranks, continue to support the Vatican, not questioning its practices, much less protesting or suing for change.

The Vatican is among the most skilled group of propagandists on the planet, and get their hooks in early with Sunday schools, Catholic private schools, and of course the religious services themselves. Their behaviour is unconscionable, but their grip over their subjects' minds is such that, even when faced with evidence of such widespread wrongdoing, the overwhelming majority of Catholics turn a blind eye or, at best, condemn the individual predators while giving the organization that allows them to flourish free access to their own children, and those of their neighbours.

Another example, which may be hearsay, is that Margaret Thatcher, the infamous Iron Lady herself, when presented with documents, in the form of family letters penned by the musician himself, proving Mozart's appallingly incestuous and scatological predilections, was utterly unable to accept the evidence before her, as it clashed too jarringly with her image of him, formed as it was by his beautiful compositions, and not by his actual words and behaviour. The man wrote of shitting on his own mother, and she wrote back, complicit.

Which, I suspect, might be explained by her being utterly enchanted to have such a child prodigy, and encouraging his every whim, no matter how filthy, until such limits were approached. But this is not a book dedicated to exposing historical malfeasance, so I will leave it at that, merely presenting Thatcher's absolute inability to accept what she had been shown, and indeed, her apparently violent reaction to it, as one more example of what Heraclitus makes reference to in the quoted material.

Heraclitus is referring to this phenomenon. Furthermore, his words express his belief that there is but one, universal truth, whatever the subject, and that people who prove unable to grasp it instead try to form their own understandings, which are inevitably in conflict with the singular, essential truth, and that to approach them otherwise is the antithesis of wisdom.

While I am not, myself, entirely confident that there is always a single, universal truth behind every idea, I certainly agree that it quite often seems to be the case, particularly when the subject matter is something I find objectionable.

Bias duly noted.

Of course, in the millennia since he made these poorly understood observations, humanity has not been completely complacent, and we have since his time managed to, if not eliminate this failure to reason, at least identify the phenomenon and give it a name:

**We call it Cognitive Dissonance, a term coined by Leon Festinger in his 1957 book *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*.**

I am not a psychologist, and will not attempt a definitive summary of modern research and thinking on the topic, but suffice it to say that it aligns very neatly with what Heraclitus is expressing.

Perhaps part of the reason that this has proved so difficult to grasp is that the notion itself may be one that invokes in people an incidence of Cognitive Dissonance? It might help to explain why scholars have been so consistently unsuccessful in parsing Heraclitus' words on the subject.

Scholars are told, by those academic authorities who came before them, that Heraclitus is obscure, impenetrable, somehow elusive, and so they see him as such, adopting this mindset, and in so doing perhaps shutting their minds to more obvious explanations, while gnawing at the few crumbs that philosophers have provided over the years, when they might have, by coming to him as blank slates, as I did, have long since deciphered that which has instead remained, until now, *nimis obscurē*.

And so, on to the remainder of the Fragments, as I have organized them according to their places among the Weeping Sage's principal notions.

B17

*οὐ γὰρ φρονέουσι τοιαῦτα πολλοί, ὁκοῖοι ἐγκυρεῦσιν, οὐδὲ μαθόντες γνώσκουσιν, ἑωυτοῖσι δὲ δοκέουσι*

The many do not take heed of such things as those they meet with, nor do they recognize them when they are taught, though they think they do.

Another pass at the Cognitive Dissonance phenomenon.

B18

*ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπηται ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ ἐξευρήσει, ἀνεξερεύνητον ἔδν καὶ ἄπορον*

If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it; for it is hard to be sought out and difficult.

Not directly related to Cognitive Dissonance, but rather an observation concerning the dangers inherent in making

assumptions, and the importance of remaining alert and keeping an open mind.

This might well have been one of Heraclitus' more obvious hints to his readers to attempt to read between the lines, as it were, when perusing his book and attempting to glean its lessons.

B19

*ἀκοῦσαι οὐκ ἐπιστάμενοι οὐδ' εἰπεῖν*

Knowing not how to listen, they do not (know) how to speak.

A fairly obvious comment on peoples' tendency to stick to their beliefs and assumptions, and the resultant effect on their ability to learn from others, the unfortunate habit many practice of, instead of listening in an effort to understand, are just waiting for their turn to speak, as well as being a general observation of what we now call behaviour blindness.

B34

*ἀξύνετοι ἀκούσαντες κωφοῖσιν εἰκόασι· φάτις  
αὐτοῖσιν μαρτυρεῖ παρεόντας ἀπεῖναι*

Hearing they do not understand, like the deaf. Of them does the saying bear witness: 'present, they are absent.'

Another take on B19, above.

B40

*πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν  
ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην, αὐτίς τε Ξενοφάνεά τε καὶ  
Ἑκαταῖον*

The learning of many things does not teach understanding; otherwise, it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

Heraclitus warning of the limitations of knowledge where understanding is the required tool in the reasoner's kit, his first such foray, and using noted seekers after knowledge as Pythagoras (with his famous triangles) as his example amongst his contemporaries who, from what little biographical information we have concerning Heraclitus' life, and his own words, above, he evidently held in some contempt, likely finding their attempts at reasoning flawed and incomplete.

B41

*ἔν τὸ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε  
πάντα διὰ πάντων*

Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things.

Again, Heraclitus makes reference to the existence of universal truths, and the importance of grasping them, as opposed to sinking into the self-delusions that are characteristic of those faced with that which triggers in them instances of Cognitive Dissonance.

B42

*τόν τε Ὀμηρον ἔφασκεν ἄξιον ἐκ τῶν ἀγώνων  
ἐκβάλλεσθαι καὶ ῥαπίζεσθαι, καὶ Ἀρχιλοχὸν ὁμοίως*

Homer deserves to be taken out of the games and beaten with a stick, and Archilochus too.

Both of the figures mentioned being poets, writers of fiction, I suspect that Heraclitus' obvious disdain for them stems from his focus on what is true, and that he may well have regarded these very popular poets' influence over their audiences as being detrimental to his own efforts to teach people to perceive and value what is real and true.

B46

*τὴν τε οἴησιν ἱερὰν νόσον ἔλεγε καὶ τὴν ὄρασιν  
ψεύδεσθαι*

Heraclitus said that thinking is a sacred disease and that sight is deceptive.

His choice of phrasing here is informative, as the Ancient Greeks considered diseases to be of divine origin, inflicted upon man by the gods. In the years following Heraclitus' time Hippocrates would present an alternative view of disease, but during his lifetime, such afflictions were believed to be the gods' doing.

Of course, when they did so, the Ancient Greeks likely didn't consider thinking to be a blight. But to Heraclitus, whose deep thinking was apparently coupled with a rather misanthropic nature, which I suspect would find itself in continual conflict with his obvious need to teach, and elevate those who proved worthy of his efforts, thinking, while elevating man from the beasts with which they share the world, also separates man from their oneness with nature, a trait he evidently prized. And so he came to his

belief that mankind can further elevate itself to a third stage of being, from childhood to adulthood, and for some, on to godhood where, by seeing clearly one is once again reunited with nature.

For most, however, his warning that sight is deceptive is consistent with his views that most people are unable to perceive the underlying truths when presented with them, and so he warns yet again against merely accepting the seemingly obvious.

B47

*μὴ εἰκῆ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων συμβαλλώμεθα*

Let us not conjecture randomly about the most important things.

Right in line with his most essential lessons, here we warns against merely casting about for answers, particularly when the subject matter is important, as by doing so one risks missing the crux of things.

Another reference consistent with his first teachings, Heraclitus is preaching Wisdom here, as an essential

element of learning and, of course, to Reasoning as he defines it. Λόγος, Lógos, Reason.

B59

*γραφέων ὁδὸς εὐθεία καὶ σκολιὴ μία ἐστὶ, φησί, καὶ ἢ αὐτὴ*

The path of writing is crooked and straight.

Was he being playful with his choice of metaphor here? If so, a rare glimpse of humour from the so-called Weeping Sage.

Of course, on the surface, writing is both crooked, in the shapes of each letter of the alphabet, and straight, in the form of the lines that make up paragraphs and sentences.

But, looking past the obvious, as his lessons encourage, even require, what is actually said by those seemingly straight (–forward) words can and often do contain deeper meanings, requiring of the reader that they not only consider what is said, but what has been left unsaid, yet meant to be grasped all the same.

B72

*ὦ μάλιστα διηενκῶς ὄμιλουσι λόγω τῷ τὰ ὅλα  
διοικοῦντι, τούτῳ διαφέρονται, καὶ οἷς καθ' ἡμέραν  
ἐγκυροῦσι, ταῦτα αὐτοῖς ξένα φαίνεται*

Most are at odds with that with which they most constantly associate -- the account which governs the universe -- and ... what they meet with every day seems foreign to them.

More reflecting on peoples' inability to see that which is at odds with their closely-held notions, and that this inability to pierce their Cognitive Dissonance results in continually being faced with, and unable to recognize, that which Heraclitus holds as being the underlying, universal truth, the 'account which governs the universe'.

In this failure of cognition, then, the people of whom he speaks must ever and continually fail to grasp that there are greater, liberating truths, and in their ongoing failure to do so, they also fail to perceive those subtle first steps on the path to godhood, wherein truth is laid bare, and the mind freed to fully govern itself.

B91

(ποταμῶ γὰρ οὐκ ἔστιν εμβῆναι δις τῶ αὐτῶ καθ' Ἡράκλειτον οὐδὲ θνητῆς οὐσίας δις ἄψασθαι κατὰ ἕξιν <τῆς αὐτῆς>. ἀλλ' ὀξύτητι καὶ τάχει μεταβολῆς) σκίδνησι καὶ πάλιν συνάγει ((μᾶλλον δὲ οὐδὲ πάλιν οὐδ' ὕστερον, ἀλλ' ἅμα)) συνίσταται καὶ ἀπολείπει καὶ πρόσσεισι καὶ ἄπεισι

(For, according to Heraclitus, it is not possible to step twice into the same river, nor is it possible to touch a mortal substance twice in so far as its state is concerned. But, thanks to the swiftness and speed of change,) it scatters <things> and brings <them> together again, ((or, rather, it brings together and lets go neither again nor later, but simultaneously)) it forms and dissolves, and it approaches and departs.

Once more into the river metaphor, to which Heraclitus repeatedly turns, ostensibly in an effort to have repetition play its role in capturing the minds of his would-be pupils, and set them on the path of wisdom.

Here he expands, commenting on a similar inability to touch a 'mortal substance' twice, as far as its 'state is

concerned’. The manner in which he conjoins the two examples seems, to me, either an effort at broadening his crucial hint or, perhaps, depending on the (now missing or unclearly positioned) text surrounding the two, perhaps it is a more frank dissertation, aimed at the reader who has, metaphorically speaking, managed to successfully ford that river.

By referencing the speed with which change ‘scatters and brings together’, while ‘letting neither go again’‘but simultaneously’ he appears, perhaps, to be transitioning from the river metaphor to his thoughts on tension, and the ‘unity of opposites’, to which I too will shift, when I have addressed the final few Fragments in this chapter.

B101

*ἔδιζήσάμην ἐμεωυτόν*

I searched myself.

I was surprised to find this Fragment, having been under the impression that the quote, above, was instead attributed to Socrates. A quick search seems to support it as originating with Heraclitus.

Which, if it is the case, fits what we know or can infer of him, seeming as he does to have held his contemporaries in rather poor esteem, and so rather than seek out their teachings or, if one is a little less kind, admitting to having done so, for him to claim that he found wisdom through self-examination, by ‘searching himself’, would seem right in line with his personality.

A quick visit to Wikipedia lists his influences as Anaximander, in that they apparently shared the conviction that there exist multiple, concurrent worlds, which is not something I have seen in Heraclitus, unless it be his references to the sleeping world, or someone misunderstanding his reference to a single, underlying truth which man finds multiple ways to avoid perceiving; Pythagoras, which would be likely to get the cranky old Greek’s back up; Bias of Priene, for whom Heraclitus has already expressed his admiration and, having read from his surviving quotations, certainly expressed notions that Heraclitus would find sympathetic, if he didn’t in fact take them from Bias’ teachings; and Zoroaster, whom is referred

to as having influenced the Weeping Sage, primarily as far as I am able to determine by one August Gladisch, in his 1859 publication, *Herakleitos Und Zoroaster: Eine Historische Untersuchung*, p. IV.

B108

ὀκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα οὐδείς ἀφικνείται ἐς τοῦτο ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅ τι σοφόν ἐστι, πάντων κεχωρισμένον

Of all whose discourses I have heard, there is not one who attains to recognizing what is wise, set apart from all.

Fairly straightforward, with Heraclitus stating that none of his predecessors, or contemporaries, to his knowledge, have achieved what he defines as being the key to wisdom, and in so doing perceived the underlying truth which he insisted was common to all, and perceived by few, if any.

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*Thinking well is the greatest excellence; and wisdom is to act and speak what is true, perceiving things according to their nature.*

---

This Fragment would put that number at ‘none’, which might help to explain Heraclitus’ generally misanthropic nature, and the typically low esteem in which he held his contemporaries, even when, such as is the case with Pythagoras, he acknowledges their efforts, while at the same time dismissing them as being of the realm of knowledge, which is open to all men, as opposed to wisdom, which is the purview of the gods.

B112

*σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη καὶ σοφίη ἀληθῆα λέγειν  
καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας*

Thinking well is the greatest excellence; and wisdom is to act and speak what is true, perceiving things according to their nature.

Dipping once more into that same well, here Heraclitus celebrates thinking and wisdom, as it pertains to perceiving the underlying truth, and speaking accordingly. He refers to understanding, of course, and makes no mention of knowledge.

Another hint as to why Heraclitus was so contemptuous, even outright hostile where Homer and his ilk, poets who couched events in stories, rather than plainly and accurately recording them.

B114

*ξὺν νόῳ λέγοντας ἰσχυρίζεσθαι χρῆ τῷ ξυνῷ πάντων, ὅκωσπερ νόμῳ πόλις καὶ πολὺ ἰσχυροτέρως· τρέφονται γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι ὑπὸ ἐνὸς τοῦ θείου· κρατεῖ γὰρ τοσοῦτον ὀκόσον ἐθέλει καὶ ἐξαρκεῖ πᾶσι καὶ περιγίνεται*

Those who speak with understanding must hold fast to what is common to all as a city holds fast to its law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are fed by the divine one. It prevails as much as it will, and suffices for all things with something to spare.

A final remonstrance in this chapter from Heraclitus, a reminder to hold fast to the common, underlying truth, and not fail in this duty, even as men must hold fast to its law.

When he refers to the divine law, which prevails ‘as much as it will’ and ‘suffices for all things with something to

spare' he is, I think, continuing to shift his narrative in the directions I will address in the coming chapters, but so as not to seem as though I am ducking the question here, I refer briefly to B33:

'And it is law, too, to obey the counsel of one'.

Heraclitus says this directly on the heels of his commenting as to the bridge between man and the divine, a topic he broaches more than once, and one concerning which I have not encountered any significant commentary. That too, then, for an upcoming chapter.

B123

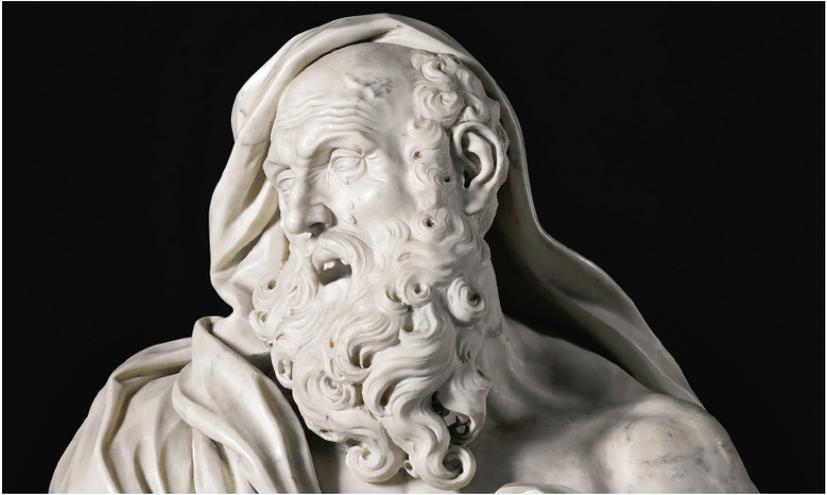
*φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ*

Nature loves to hide.

A clever little observation, particularly when one considers that he titled his book *On Nature*, and the keys to wisdom couched within its pages.

Here he is reminding us that his underlying truths are right under our noses, but that we fail to perceive them because, as previously mentioned, one must be prepared to do so at all times.

A call to action, then, couched in a simple observation. That man should be ever vigilant and mentally prepared to recognize these truths when presented with them, and not to retreat into those preconceptions which might be thought of as being safer, more comfortable.



5

## THE EPHESIAN KEY

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*Had he been found to be less 'obscure', or more likely, had his work, *On Nature* not been damaged and partially lost in antiquity, it is certain that scholars would now think in terms of the Pre-Heraclitan thinkers and philosophers.*

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**Wisdom is learning the limitations of knowledge, and the importance of understanding to the rational mind.**

~The Author

*πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει· Ἡσίοδον γὰρ ἂν  
 ἐδίδαξε καὶ Πυθαγόρην, αὐτίς τε Ξενοφάνεά τε καὶ  
 Ἑκαταῖον*

The learning of many things does not teach understanding; otherwise, it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

~Heraclitus

The preceding definition (mine), and declaration (Heraclitus') serve, I trust, to illustrate that there is, in both the Ancient Greeks' eyes, specifically those of Heraclitus and Socrates, and my own, an important distinction to be drawn between what can be known, where that concept of knowing breaks down, even becoming dangerous, and where understanding becomes the required act of reasoning.

Qualifying Heraclitus of Ephesus as being a Pre-Socratic thinker, or philosopher does him great injustice, being accurate only in the strictly chronological sense of that term. Socrates himself would, and in fact is, the first to agree, as he made his allegiance with his literary peer and

predecessor abundantly clear, as I will show. The label Pre-Socratic suggests a significant distinction, one that separates schools of thought, and the import we accord them, by the remarkable life of Socrates, simply because people failed to parse Heraclitus, and so denied him the respect he richly deserves. Had he been found to be less ‘obscure’, or more likely, had his work, *On Nature* not been damaged and partially lost in antiquity, it is certain that scholars would now think in terms of the Pre-Heraclitan thinkers and philosophers.

The implication that he was in any way a lesser thinker, or that his influence was limited to the extent that subsequent scholars’ failure to understand him reflects, even as he is recognized as being the first to have coined the term λόγος, *Lógos*, or Reason, as having particular relevance to those Greeks who followed him, namely Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

That he is still in any way ‘obscure’ more than two thousand years later cannot, however, be solely attributed to the tragedy that is his treatise, *On Nature*, being damaged

by the destruction of the Temple of Artemis by Herostratus in 356 BCE.

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*That I had no difficulty understanding him because I had already reached many of the same conclusions in my efforts to build my own mind, and that my grasp of allegory and metaphor was quite sufficient to recognize my own thoughts when presented with them, and that, lastly, my life-long enthusiasm for the mythology and stories of that time and place was also sufficient to suggest context where others seemed, inexplicably, to be chasing shadows.*

---

I hadn't the faintest inkling as to Heraclitus of Ephesus' having ever lived, much less his position at the head of the λόγος table of Greek Philosophers, when I first read a few of his more well-known, if not necessarily well-interpreted passages, courtesy of Wikipedia, with its quirky structuring of his page, at least as it was organized in the Autumn of 2013, and which I reproduce here:

This Lógos holds always but humans always prove unable to understand it, both before hearing it and when they have first

heard it. For though all things come to be in accordance with this Lógos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep.

–Heraclitus, as attributed by Diels-Kranz, 22B1

For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the Lógos is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B2

Listening not to me but to the Lógos it is wise to agree that all things are one.

–Diels-Kranz, 22B50

The article then goes on to mention:

What Lógos means here is not certain: it may mean 'reason' or 'explanation' in the sense of an objective cosmic law; or it may signify nothing more than 'saying' or 'wisdom'. Yet, an

independent existence of a universal Lógos was clearly suggested by Heraclitus.

By the time I picked myself off the floor, metaphorically speaking, at the news that this had been in any in any way unclear, which perplexed me to no end, given that I have been espousing the same sentiment since 1998, I had concluded that more, and properly rigorous study of this newly–encountered ‘me’ was called for.

Research soon led me to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, and from there the source material, all 129 Fragments, both transliterated and in the original Ancient Greek, which I occasionally also subjected to Google Translate with sufficiently encouraging results that I continued my line of inquiry, eventually coming across The Heraclitus Fragments and their scholarly transliterations, which I was quite content to trust, insofar as over the centuries the academic community of Ancient Greek linguists could almost certainly handle this, and should any errors or contentious parsing occur, it would no doubt be

noticed and commented upon by that same community of learned scholars.

I belabour this point ever so slightly in response to one Professor of Philosophy, specializing in the Ancient Greeks at McGill University, who responded to my query, and offer to share what I had learned should he be interested in co-publishing, recognizing as I did that my credentials among academic circles were more none than slim and naively assuming that someone with a passion for the period and personalities involved would, at the very least, be curious enough to give a cursory glance at an offered manuscript. I feel the need to state that my attitude was, and remains respectful, and not at all arrogant I hope. I generously, I thought, offered to share full credit for everything I'd collected with a total stranger whose ultimate contribution to my efforts consisted of opining, politely mind, and probably thinking himself helpful in so doing that, if I didn't speak Ancient Greek, I couldn't have a relevant opinion concerning these words.

To which I replied then, and repeat now, with all due respect where deserved, that I am willing to give the academic world's two and a half thousand years and counting working at it credit for successfully producing the most accurate literal translations of the source material available to me, including potentially my own should I take a few years to immerse myself in Ancient Greek, and that I would content myself with simply attempting to understand what I was reading, in English, with occasional commentary by said scholars, and feel confident that it was sufficiently consistent and comprehensive that some possible minor error in translation had not, of itself, been the cause of all this seeming obscurity.

That said, my original intent when looking into this unknown to me old Greek was not to conclude that I had, apparently, done what no one since five hundred years before Jesus appeared on the scene had managed to accomplish. I was actually looking for the obvious and fatal flaw or contradiction that would prove, to me at least, that I

was in fact mistaken, and enjoy a good laugh at myself for my hubris in even considering the alternative.

It somehow makes sense to me, and my bias may be showing here, that to the academic world, founded as it is, or appears to me at any rate to be on the notion of an accumulation of authority on any given topic, and the dependence thereon by new students when attempting their own models of understanding, would accord immense weight to anything that has the feel of Plato about it, even if it happens to involve the sort of intuitive leap that seems to me to be anathema to Plato's method of breaking down and comparing things to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

An approach, which I might add, serves admirably where knowledge and, by extension, what is knowable is concerned.

Isn't it also pretty much the definition of the scientific method? I'm genuinely in the dark here, I don't speak science, but either way it is deeply flawed when the required tool is understanding. Plato, as far as I can tell, and I claim absolutely no expertise where he is concerned, could drill

down with the best of them, and his rhetoric is undeniably persuasive, but I don't believe he could jump up, to make the intuitive leap required by Heraclitus, based on incomplete or deliberately, dare I say it, obscure information, albeit with at least one possible, and if so achingly poignant exception upon which I will eventually speculate.

In this it is in no way helpful that Heraclitus chose to require those who would profit most from his teachings to, in essence, see past his deliberate obfuscations, as it is pretty well accepted, I think, that a key element of writing, when attempting to communicate an idea, is clarity.

Nor is it particularly convenient that Socrates relied solely on the spoken word, while also encouraging people to reach an understanding towards which he would guide and prod them, but never, ever flat-out explain, and so we have only second-hand accounts (and those are of course coloured by the extent of the observer's understanding his meanings and intent) from which to profit from his fabulously supple mind.

I do find it significant, however, that both Heraclitus and Socrates appear to share the conviction that understanding cannot simply be granted, but must rather be earned. Perhaps the most valuable notions concerning reasoning, wisdom and understanding were not the ones most easily shared.

While on the topic of Plato, and just for completeness' sake regarding the big four, I have nothing to add concerning Aristotle, and nothing but respect for his teachings, as I understand them. Which is not as well as I should like, and his works are high on my priorities where further reading is concerned.

I will therefore get to the point and, in the following chapters, address and explain in detail the supposedly obscure words of Heraclitus of Ephesus, providing context and my own commentary as seems best to me, before turning to Socrates for corroboration, if it is in fact to be found in the words attributed to him.

I will do so by examining each of the Heraclitus Fragments, after having divided them into a number of

groupings, each reflecting one of the Weeping Sage's primary themes, which I will present and support as best I can, and let the readers decide for themselves whether I, and perhaps Socrates, have managed to present a coherent, consistent and compelling case for having lifted the subject of this volume from obscurity, into the bright light of the readers' scrutiny.

If nothing else, I hope that this book might serve as a starting point for discussion by minds greater than mine, and voices more eloquent.



6

## NIMIS OBSCURĒ – UNDERSTANDING

### HERACLITUS

B13

*ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ*

On those who enter the same rivers, ever different waters flow.

I think it best to start not at the beginning of the Fragments, but with what is perhaps Heraclitus' most famous saying, as it is both easily digested and serves to illustrate his method of teaching, as well as his expectations of those who would profit from his wisdom. There exists a few variations on these words, quoted above, but none differ in any meaningful way from the one I've elected to present.

While it might have been less recognized in Heraclitus' day (but likely not, as Aesop's Fables spring immediately to mind), the use of allegory is by now a well-documented and thoroughly familiar literary form. And that's all this is, a metaphor for experience, and growing and learning from it.

One can not, in fact, step twice into the same river. Either the river itself will have changed, as they do, requiring those who would safely navigate it to constantly relearn its course, or the person taking that step will have changed, having met with new experiences since their last attempt. Even their first step into the river was an

experience that altered the subject's expectations of doing so again.

Lastly, such details as the circumstances in which they wet their feet, the company in which they do so, their purpose in taking these steps

I trust that the reader gets the idea. For whatever reason(s), each dip into the river, being a metaphor for life and its many experiences, changes the one undertaking it.

Why, then, does Heraclitus place such apparent emphasis on bringing this to the readers' attention?

It's because the notion of learning, and growing from ones' experiences brings up the question of just how one goes about doing so. What does one take away from an experience, and how does one then digest it?

To the unexamined life, these changes shape the subject without their having fully grasped their meaning and significance.

To the philosopher, or critical thinker, however, being conscious of such influences at play requires understanding, the cognitive tool that recognizes when

change is at hand, and adjusts the thinker's attitudes accordingly. It is not sufficient to merely know, in these instances, as knowledge is in many ways static. More on that later.

One must grasp that they are undergoing a process, that of interpreting the people, places and events around them, that is never-ending. One does not 'fully understand' much in life as, just as the person attempting such understanding is growing and changing as a result of their new insights, so too are the people, places and events surrounding and affecting them continuing to evolve, necessitating further examination and understanding, and so on, in finitus, ad nauseam, etc

Heraclitus, through the use of this pretty little metaphor, is warning the reader, or rather providing him with a hint that they must be prepared to abandon the, in this instance, false security of knowing and prepare themselves to undertake the much more challenging, and often uncertain effort required to acquire, or increase ones' understanding.

Of self. Of others. Of events. Of how all these things are interrelated. This is λόγος, or Lógos; Reason, the term he coined as being the key to his philosophies, and the return on investment for those who successfully grasped his teachings. With the river metaphor firmly in mind, I have defined λόγος, Lógos–with–a–capital–L as best I can thusly:

**‘The wisdom to recognize and understand the underlying truths which are common to all’.**

If this is such a crucial notion, then, the reader might reasonably ask, why didn’t he just come out and say so? No less a formidable thinker than Aristotle, who failed to grasp this unspoken lesson, was highly critical of Heraclitus for being unclear in his writing.

Heraclitus, and his disciple Socrates, as I will get around to attempting to demonstrate, clearly believed that it was essential that his readers (or listeners, in Socrates’ case) make this leap on their own. That simply telling them so would prove detrimental to their actually grasping and benefitting from his lessons.

And if this is so, am I not then doing both him and you, the reader, a disservice by laying it out in these pages?

Perhaps, to an extent, but it has been some twenty–five hundred years since Heraclitus wrote *On Nature*, and we’ve advanced our collective grasp of many of these fundamental concepts, to the extent I am confident I am doing the reader no harm by this explanation. Also, it is not my role to presume to educate, or re–educate, but rather to cast light on what has too long been considered *nimis obscurĒ*, too obscure.

A brief digression then, in which I refer to Socrates and his famous habit of declaring that he knew nothing.

While certainly not entirely true, in that I am confident he was aware, for example, that one plus one equals two, etc., which is an example of knowledge employed properly, which is to say where facts and constants are concerned.

What he was doing was rejecting the idea that everything can or should be knowable, when, again, understanding it the Reasoning tool required. Socrates denied knowing anything, but he was unwavering in his

devotion to understanding the people and world around him.

When you read Socrates declaring *'I don't know'*, just try appending an unspoken *'but I understand'* and you get the full message he is trying to convey, again, with the apparent conviction, shared with his predecessor Heraclitus, that to simply come out and say so would defeat his intended lesson.

Or, as Socrates famously said, *"I can't teach anyone anything. I can only make them think."*

On, then, to the nature of knowledge, and knowing, and just what can and should be known, as opposed to what can become very dangerous when couched in terms of knowledge, and knowing.

As previously defined, knowledge is the tool to use where facts, and constants are concerned. I quote myself here, drawing on an open letter I wrote to Professor Stephen Hawking upon reading his assertion that philosophy is dead, and that science alone represents humanity's best hope moving forward:

*“One plus one equals two! This is fabulously true as far as I am aware, and being able to learn, and thus know such facts is vital to learning, as it would be a terrible pain to have to reason that out every time a bit of math might be required.*

*And not only is it reliably the case, but being so it can be taught. Knowledge can be passed on, and in so doing, save others the intellectual effort required to figure out the fundamentals of an applicable subject for themselves. Furthermore, when knowledge is shared, people can leverage those common points of reference and see where they might lead, in effect networking their minds and increasing exponentially humanity’s store of knowledge.*

*From one plus one equals two, on to division, multiplication, and eventually calculus, geometry, trigonometry, to Pythagoras and his triangles, and so on and so forth until we come to physics, and electricity, computers, medicine Atomic bombs, industrial waste Ah. Well. Clearly knowledge, of itself, is not the only tool man need employ if we’re going to continue our evolution both as*

*individuals and collectively. But it is a valuable tool when used properly, and that includes the teaching of it, the passing of our discoveries to our fellows, and in time to future generations.*

*And that knowledge sticks. Once we've learned a fact, or a scientific theory, or other knowable thing, we tack it down in our memory, paying careful attention to ensuring that it stays there through study, application and repetition. The mind craves such building blocks, and holds onto them once acquired."*

*As Isaac Newton so famously expressed his having benefited from knowledge and teaching:*

*"If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."*

*~Sir Isaac Newton*

*But there are situations where knowledge is not the required reasoner's tool. As I have, I hope, shown, both Heraclitus and Socrates championed the importance of understanding, which applies when the subject of the*

*would-be reasoner's attention is neither a fact, nor a constant, and therefore cannot fully be known, but rather efforts can be made at understanding, a continually evolving process as both the subject and the observer are changed by their circumstances and experiences.*

*Because people can, whether by explicit instruction or when learning by observation, when couched in terms of absolutes, or presented as fact, particularly when done so by a trusted source, such as a parent or peer group, be 'taught' some fairly alarming notions which, once accepted as fact, become equally ingrained, and so vexingly difficult to subsequently dislodge.*

*Such as, and I apologize for being blunt here, but as an example:*

**'All Black people are'**

*That is a very vivid, and undeniably harmful notion to have cemented into ones' consciousness. In short, to learn, likely from ones' parents and community, but also possibly from what we now, I hope, recognize as being outdated and*

*invalidated academic or cultural source material, and in so learning come to accept it as fact, which is then cemented into place in the unfortunate learner's mind.*

*Prejudice is a learned, and by extension taught, failure to understand other people, masquerading as knowledge, and acquired as such.”*

(As an aside, if I've neglected some important field of scientific inquiry or, worse yet, misrepresented any, it is entirely the fault of the author, who was never successfully formally educated, and who has always held a particular aversion to learning complex formulae and similarly abstract notions not pertaining to subjects collectively referred to as the Humanities. Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa in the event.)

Similarly, the notion of goodness is a dangerous one, because once a mind embraces 'being good' as part of ones' self-identification, it can go all kinds of wrong.

When one embraces the notion that they are good, they unwittingly open the door to the seemingly logical conclusion that those who are different from them, in

whatever way reflects upon their being good must therefore, by definition, not be good. Which might be expressed as simply as ‘not measuring up’ or could ultimately cast the stranger as being ‘bad’ or even ‘evil’, depending on the flavour of ‘goodness’ one has embraced.

People certainly can, and have, and continue to be taught that they are ‘in fact’ good, and right, and that others are therefore bad, wrong, infidel

Which suggests to me that, to a healthy mind, free from having received too much such instruction, once again it is understanding that is the tool required.

To try and understand what it means to be good, what is and can be good, and what must not be so labeled is essential if one is to free oneself from, or at least be cautiously aware of, ones’ acquired prejudices.

For example, how much healthier might it be to think along these lines?

‘I try to be a good person, to do good things, to admire and support those things that I identify as being good, but I am also conscientious of the need to keep examining, and

trying to understand, these subjects, and the very concept of goodness itself and, in so doing, also considering their opposites’.

‘I also try to understand what and why I might perceive other people, institutions or things as being bad, and to differentiate merely being different from being inherently wrong’.

Wordy, I know, but that’s how I taught myself to think, having never been, as I understand the term as it relates to my own experiences, socialized as a child.

Tragic when I was young, and certainly an ongoing source of difficulty for me, as I have never, and I suspect will never fit in with much of society as a result, but ultimately liberating as an adult when, after years of misery and trying, and failing to belong, I have been able to form my own opinions on certain sensitive topics.

At the same time I suspect I lack a great deal of what I refer to as ‘unspoken fluency’, be it body language, empathy, or simply projecting the right tone, intuiting a

group's consensus, which is particularly evident in person, making the Internet a life-saving tool for me.

I am convinced that this early tendency towards trying to understand, as opposed to accepting being taught, and by extension what to learn, and how to learn it, was vital in allowing me to, as I put it, build my own mind when later in life I found myself floundering, surrounded by people and events who didn't fit the 'feel' of the ideals commonly ascribed to them to me at all.

It was unquestionably this emphasis on trying to understand, and never feeling confident enough in my footing as to casually misstep into the realm of certitude, that led me to grasp, and express to anyone around me, as they would likely ruefully attest, my great frustration concerning the observed phenomenon of, as I most commonly put it, 'people going out of their way to shove their heads up their own asses rather than acknowledge the obvious'.

Or, as Heraclitus put it...

All of this, then, leads to my examining Heraclitus' thoughts and teachings, as presented by the Fragments of his book, *On Nature*, beginning with what are widely considered his most indecipherable statements and my efforts to accurately express their meaning, such that a coherent, consistent, compelling narrative results.

I feel that I should mention that, when I wrote about having instantly parsed Heraclitus' words because I had gotten there first, at least in my own timeline, that I am referring to his words regarding experience, understanding, the limits of knowledge and the importance of understanding, as well as his observations on the topic of Cognitive Dissonance.

He makes quite a few additional observations, which I have done my best to present within the framework of a coherent whole, with particular attention paid to what I know, or understand of both the events and cultures amidst which he lived.

These remaining notions, as expressed in his Fragments, are ones I had to work at, and while I am

confident in my findings, presented in these pages and divided into sections, each devoted to an overarching idea or theme, there are, I admit, a few Fragments concerning which I gained no particular insight.

Some are simply incomplete, likely due to the damage done to his book, *On Nature*. though I have read that certain among his peers reported the book to be incomplete as submitted to the Temple of Artemis.

Some quotes attributed to Heraclitus appear to me to be of to me dubious authenticity, particularly those to which no source is attributed, and in some cases not even having an accepted Ancient Greek original to quote from, at least not that I could find, and I particularly reject those which attribute to him any form of Christian ideology, which to me is obviously an association tacked on to his name long after his death, as the early Vatican sought, as it did elsewhere, to gain credibility by adopting and subsuming people and practices native to other cultures and/or ideologies.

Lastly, there are those Fragments which, I admit, just make no sense to me, in spite of my efforts to tame them.

They are typically among the most incomplete or, ah, Fragmented Fragments.

That said, all of the above amount to a small fraction of the totality of his words and, I am reasonably confident, their omission does not undermine the conclusions and opinions I have gleaned throughout my studies.

On to the numbered Fragments then, beginning with the remainder of his thoughts on the primary topics he and I appear to hold in common, before delving into his, to me, and apparently to the rest of the world to–date’s new ideas.



## 7

**TENSION, OR THE UNITY OF OPPOSITES**

Heraclitus addresses his notion of a ‘unity of opposites’ early in his writing. It has become one of the central themes of his teachings in the eyes of those who studied him, and rightly so, as he was not a proponent of a static existence, believing that change was a constant.

I would further add the qualifier that he was also an advocate of tension, or strife, as a motivating factor in human affairs, and that ones' character was tested and subsequently revealed by conflict.

Further, that such tension, or strife was, in his view, vital to mankind's development. Be it in war, and Heraclitus appears to have been an ardent proponent of martial prowess and the glory it brought, or in peace, where art, culture, thinking, all of these flourished under a constant state of flux. Or, as one alternate translation of one of his quotes suggests, 'everything flows'.

B8

*τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων  
καλλίστην ἁρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ' ἔριον γίνεσθαι*

What opposes unites, and the finest attunement stems from things bearing in opposite directions, and all things come about by strife.

Here he could be referring to the tension of a drawn bowstring, resisted in equal measure by the bow itself, or just as easily be expressing an idea akin to the Yin–Yang

that is one of the most recognized and accessible aspects of Chinese culture.

Either way, and whatever the case, it seems clear that Heraclitus was a firm believer in such dynamic tension, and the role that tension, or strife plays in shaping both men and their cultures.

Perhaps a complementary notion might be found in Hemingway's celebration of 'grace under pressure'. What is clear, in any event, is that Heraclitus was neither squeamish nor much of a pacifist.

B10

*συλλάψεις· ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον  
διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διαᾶδον καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ  
ἐξ ἐνὸς πάντα*

Graspings: things whole and not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one.

The one in question being Heraclitus' conviction that there exists an underlying truth which governs all things,

and so reflects both sides of a concept, such as the harmonious and the discordant.

Whether drawn together or torn asunder, all of these things are encompassed by this underlying truth, and wisdom is found in recognizing it, and acting in accordance to its dictates, which to those who lack similar understanding may well appear to be the sort of incomplete expression of an idea that so troubled Aristotle in his efforts to grasp Heraclitus' teachings.

B11

*πᾶν γὰρ ἐρπετὸν πληγῇ νέμεται*

Every beast is driven to pasture with a blow.

Here we have one of the simplest, most universally recognized expressions of the driving force that he expresses as strife.

B23

*Δίκης ὄνομα οὐκ ἂν ᾔδεσαν, εἰ ταῦτα μὴ ἦν*

They would not have known the name of justice if these things were not.

Another expression of the notion of a unity of opposites, Heraclitus appears to be referring to injustice, the balancing, opposite side of the concept of justice.

That without injustice, oppression, what have you, man would not have grasped the expression of its opposite, justice.

B24

*ἀρηιφάτους θεοὶ τιμῶσι καὶ ἄνθρωποι*

Gods and men honour those who are slain by Ares.

Ares is most commonly recognized as the god of war and strife, of course, and so here is being expressed the not unfamiliar notion that those who give their lives in battle are honoured for their sacrifice, a notion that continues to this day.

B25

*μόροι γὰρ μέζονες μέζοντας μοίρας λαγχάνουσι*

Greater deaths win greater portions.

An elaboration on B24, above, in which our oft–obscure author is being quite straightforward when he offers that ‘greater deaths’, by which I take it to mean those resulting from great acts of valour, or in service to other, the sort we would define as being ‘heroic’ win that person their commensurately ‘greater portion’, be it reflected in mortal fame and glory, in a favoured position in the afterlife, or both.

Finally, as Ares was also the God of Strife, and given that strife is not a purely martial notion, he could very well have been honouring those who, through their words and actions, brought about change, in society, in thought, and in accomplishments, all of which he believed best flourished in an environment of continual flux.

B48

*βίος τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος ἔργον δὲ θάνατος*

Bow: the bow's name is life, though its work is death.

(*biós*, Homeric word for bow -- *bíos*, life)

Heraclitus is offering us a rare glimpse into his wittier, though possibly not necessarily lighter side with this observation, and I thank Randy Hoyt for the context provided.

He may also be suggesting that life and death are inseparable, that one follows forever on the heels of the other. This would be consistent with his other thoughts on the matter.

B51

*οὐ ξυνιαῶσιν ὄκως διαφερόμενον ἔωυτῶ ὁμολογέει·  
παλίντροπος ἄρμονίη ὄκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης*

which is too diffused as it is being charged; a pulley of a perfect arc

An annoyingly incomplete Fragment, yet from what can be gleaned from it, it certainly belongs in this chapter, devoted to the notion of strife and the ‘unity of opposites’ observed with regards to Heraclitus’ writing in antiquity.

As many of the modern uses of the word ‘charged’ are not applicable to the Ancient Greeks, I interpret this is its

original, martial sense. That Heraclitus may be suggesting, absent further context, that an opposing force is scattered, ‘diffused’ by a focused charge, and that the resultant effect resembles the leverage applied by a ‘pulley of a perfect arc’.

B60

*ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή*

The way up and the way down is one and the same.

Another example of ‘two sides of the same coin’, here he is expressing what would become known as his theory of the ‘unity of opposites’ when he so opines.

That, having found the way up, the traveler (be this a literal, or metaphorical expression) has, as a result, also learned the way down.

B64

*τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίξει κεραυνός*

The thunderbolt that steers all things.

Metaphor for Heraclitus’ belief in a universal, underlying truth.

B80

*εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον εἶναι ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην  
ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεῶν*

We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being through strife necessarily.

Here we have Heraclitus at his most explicit as he declares that war is universal, and that strife, or tension, is an essential element of creativity.

B84

*μεταβάλλον ἀναπαύεται*

...

*κάματός ἐστι τοῖς αὐτοῖς μοχθεῖν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι*

It rests by changing.

...

It is a weariness to labor for the same masters and be ruled by them.

A little challenging here, but as my mother always says ‘a change is as good as a rest’, and I think that’s essentially what Heraclitus is saying in the first half of this Fragment.

That, whatever state or toil he might refer to, a change, or taking a new state is as helpful as resting, as it presents new challenges and opportunities to be explored.

As to the second half of the Fragment, it seems clear enough to me that he is expressing his sentiment that to be constantly under the heel of the same people, first as masters while at labour, and further to be ruled outside of one's working hours by those same people is, as he puts it, 'wearying'.

We might express a not so different feeling when we say that 'familiarity breeds contempt'.

B111

*νοῦσος ὑγιείην ἐποίησεν ἠδὲ καὶ ἀγαθόν, λιμὸς κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν*

It is sickness that makes health pleasant and good; hunger, plenty; weariness, rest.

An obvious reminder that we appreciate those things we deem as good and pleasant most by their absence. Being sick, hungry and/or weary teaches us to value our health,

prosperity and rest all the more when we are so fortunate as to experience them.

B125

*καὶ ὁ κυκεῶν δίσταται <μὴ> κινούμενος*

Even the barley-drink separates if it is not stirred.

Just a quick reminder that things need to be kept in motion.



8

## THE THREE STATES OF BEING

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*Of course, such immortality is not restricted to philosophers, and the reader can no doubt effortlessly summon to mind any number of such seminal geniuses who they find particularly in harmony with their own ways of understanding.*

---

Heraclitus repeatedly made mention of three states of being, though he didn't phrase it precisely that way. But, as the Fragments to follow illustrate, he expressed his belief

that there are in essence three stages of human being; childhood, adulthood, and godhood.

The latter being achieved when man learns wisdom, and comes to see the underlying truths which face him, recognizes them as such and speaks to them. In this he is not referring to a literal godhead, but rather to an advanced state of being.

Any immortality which he might be observed commenting on would, therefore, be of the sort accorded the true geniuses among mankind, including those philosophers who followed him, namely Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Of course, such immortality is not restricted to philosophers, and the reader can no doubt effortlessly summon to mind any number of such seminal geniuses who they find particularly in harmony with their own ways of understanding.

The author has already made mention of the likes of Albert Einstein, Muhammad Ali and John Lennon, but would add, while the topic is at hand, Beethoven, Thomas Jefferson and, above all, Michelangelo.

Heraclitus makes reference, as we shall see, of such a man, upon achieving godhood, being both willing and not to be called by the name Zeus. In this, I believe, he speaks of embracing this greater than merely human status without laying claim to Mount Olympus, or implying that any lightning bolts he might throw are of any but an intellectual nature.

Still, his writing makes specific reference to this godhood, and it seems evident that he claims it for himself. Just as, interestingly and perhaps not so coincidentally, Socrates made reference to his own ‘Daimon’, without being explicit as to whether it implied some form of divine inspiration:

*“What do I think is the reason for this? I will tell you. What has happened to me may well be a good thing, and those of us who believe death to be an evil are certainly mistaken. I have convincing proof of this, for it is impossible that my familiar sign did not oppose me if I was not about to do what was right.”*

*~Socrates, Apology 40b-c*

In this context, I am confident that he meant it as posited by his influencer, Heraclitus. Perhaps this even lent to Socrates a measure of the unfathomable courage he displayed before his accusers, whilst delivering his Apology, and his declaring that he would rather die of speaking his way than live by submitting to speaking in a manner more pleasing to his accusers. Perhaps the understanding that he had achieved, and was in the process of further cementing his own immortality was of some comfort to him, in his final moments, during which, it seems obvious to me, that rather than defending himself from his accusers' charges, he was instead making a final, monumental effort to communicate a sense of understanding among his audience.

That he apparently failed was tragic. That in recording his words Plato also appears to have missed their deeper meanings is both lamentable and, it seems likely, one of the reasons that by extension Heraclitus' teachings, in those moments expressed by Socrates, would remain 'obscure' for millennia to follow.

To be clear, I make no such claim to godhood. If, through my own deliberations and the accident of fate that brought the Weeping Sage and his supposedly unclear words to my attention at a stage in my life at which I was ready to receive them, and recognize myself in one of his most basic tenets, then it is what it is, but I am and will remain the first to decry any notion that I have in any way transcended my fellow man.

Quite to the contrary, I am all too aware just how far I have to climb before I might one day comfortably assert myself as being worthy of inclusion in any reasonable peer groups. Perhaps this volume of mine may serve as a tentative first step; that is for the reader to decide.

As I have been, and shall continue to attempt throughout this book, I will interpret Heraclitus not only through the sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical understanding of his words, but also by placing them in their cultural and historical context as best I understand them, having long been an enthusiast of ancient Greek myths and legends, and more recently attempting to better

understand their culture, and those seminal figures, philosophers and otherwise, who defined it.

Heraclitus makes extensive use of metaphor and, being an ancient Greek, in essence if not strictly as a matter of fact (as he was born in Ephesus, which was at that time part of the Persian Empire, though it appears to have had much more in common, culturally, with neighbouring Greek city-states), it seems likely to me in the extreme that he would couch his words in those commonly shared images of his time, what we might define as being the cultural literacy of his day.

When he, as will be shown in a later chapter, makes repeated reference to fire, why would it not be in the context of his time, which as it happens remains that of our own, and refer to Prometheus? Stealing fire, the divine spark, etc., all of these are very familiar metaphors today, having endured since Heraclitus' times. It would be lazy not to explore his words through them, as his emphasis on plain speaking would demand that, even when only hinting at his true

meanings, he present his words in the context and through the forms intimately familiar to his fellow readers.

Also, I feel the need to make mention here, as it will quickly become relevant, that Heraclitus was embraced by early Christians, the Stoics, as I understand it, likely erroneously.

Without prejudice, it can be confidently asserted that Christianity has had a habit, over the centuries, of absorbing and re-packaging the figures, sites and events of other cultures. In this Heraclitus would appear to be a tempting candidate, making reference as he does to a god, or gods, throughout numerous Fragments of his work.

I wish to be clear in that I am examining, and interpreting as best as I am able, and as seems right to me, Heraclitus' words as put forth by that man, during his lifetime, and that nothing I have read on these topics indicate that he had the slightest interest in, or even knowledge of, Christianity, and neither as it happens do I.

On, then, to this most recent (and arbitrary) collection of Fragments:

B14

*τὰ γὰρ νομιζόμενα κατ' ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια  
ἀνιερωστὶ μνευται*

The mysteries practiced among men are unholy mysteries.

Here I call attention to his specifying ‘among men’, while at the same time expressing a slight queasiness as to the origins and authenticity of this Fragment, without claiming the scholarly knowledge which might allow me to authenticate it.

Taken on its face, he is making the distinction between those practices of man’s, as opposed to those of he and his fellows, who had, in his estimation, achieved godhood.

And so by definition, attempts by man to ape the rites of gods would be unholy. Literally so, as in lacking in holiness, and in the commonly accepted manner in which we accept the term to imply the profane.

Where I am admittedly queasy is where later, early Christian sects apparently attached themselves to Heraclitus, as they did so many other non-Christian figures and practices. It would appear to me that, if so, then this

would be a particularly tempting quote to promote, if not in fact falsely attribute to Heraclitus.

Lacking at this time the energy and desire to appear to position myself as an opponent of Christianity, then, I will accept the Fragment as genuine and offer that interpretation, couched in his time and culture, and deliberately turn a blind eye to any other meanings which may or not have been attributed to him throughout the ages.

B20

*γενόμενοι ζῶειν ἐθέλουσι μόρους τ' ἔχειν, μᾶλλον  
δὲ ἀναπαύεσθαι, καὶ παῖδας καταλείπουσι μόρους  
γενέσθαι*

When they are born, they wish to live and to meet with their dooms – or rather to rest – and they leave children behind them to meet with their dooms in turn.

This appears to me to be a fairly innocuous observation as to the fate of the common man, with the additional, and to me telling comment that they, in living and dying according to their measure, pass this fate, or doom along to their children in turn.

One of Heraclitus' Fragments (B74) is an express warning against this, an admonition that we must not, in fact, act and speak like children of our parents.

It may be, I hope, safely inferred then that he, or others who attain for themselves the status of godhood would not behave in this manner, and that any lessons they might pass on to their progeny would encourage that they, equipped

with a measure of understanding, and therefore wisdom, might find their own paths.

B21

*θάνατός ἐστιν ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ὀρέομεν, ὁκόσα δὲ εὕδοντες ὕπνος*

All the things we see when awake are death, even as all we see in slumber are sleep.

I tugged at this one for a considerable while, resisting the urge to consign it to the collection of Fragments which elude me.

What I finally took from this, and which seems to me to be in harmony with other Fragments' teachings, is that man exists in two states, waking and sleeping, and that each is its own world, albeit ones which can and do intersect.

If so then, it is part of the living's portion to face death, as being a very real, indeed the final part of a man's life, and that as such it has no place in the realm of dreams, where we are safe from such sobering, frequently terrifying thoughts and realities.

More on this in the Fragments to follow.

B26

*ἄνθρωπος ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φάος ἄπτεται ἑαυτῷ  
(ἀποθανόντων) ἀποσβεσθεὶς ὄψεις, ζῶν δὲ ἄπτεται  
τεθνεῶτος εὐδων, (ἀποσβεσθεὶς ὄψεις), ἐγρηγορῶς  
ἄπτεται εὐδοντος*

Man kindles a light for himself in the night-time, when he has died but is alive. The sleeper, whose vision has been put out, lights up from the dead; he that is awake lights up from the sleeping.

Here we have the sleeper presented as being, if I understand Heraclitus correctly, to be sometimes or always a visitor to Hades, the realm of the dead. The kindling of a light may be symbolic, or more practical, but in either case it helps differentiate between the quick, and the dead.

The references to ‘lighting up’ from the dead, and those who awaken ‘light up’ from sleeping, brings to my mind the symbolism with which fire has been accorded, seemingly since the dawn of time, and to me suggests such an intent here, reflected in the dreams of the sleeper as having about them something of a divine revelation, whereas the waking

man passes from such somnabulant wanderings into the bright light of day, and the demands it places on man's efforts at understanding, their search for wisdom, which can also be likened to kindling a flame.

In any case, Heraclitus clearly suggests that waking and sleeping are two different states, and that man occupies them each in turn, similar but different, and that this is his natural state, as Heraclitus seems to be explaining, not warning.

B27

*ἀνθρώπους μένει ἀποθανόντας ἄσσα οὐκ ἔλπονται  
οὐδὲ δοκέουσιν*

There awaits men when they die such things as they look not for nor dream of.

While I am not comfortable speculating just what it might be that awaits men when they die, Heraclitus clearly differentiates it from both what the conscious mind might consider, and the strange shores onto which our dreams might carry us.

B29

*αἰρεῦνται γὰρ ἐν ἀντὶ ἀπάντων οἱ ἄριστοι, κλέος  
ἀέναον θνητῶν· οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ κεκόρηνται ὄκωσπερ  
κτῆνεα*

For even the best of them choose one thing above all others, immortal glory among mortals, while most of them are glutted like beasts.

Here Heraclitus begins to approach his notion of a third state of being. That the best of them (man, specifically those who seek and find wisdom through understanding) choose godhood, and that which it conveys, ‘immortal glory among mortals’ (note the distinction of these men from mortals), while the majority, which is to say those who have not achieved wisdom and, with it, godhood are content to glut themselves on the rewards that even a failed attempt to transcend might offer. After all, those who approach such accomplishment, even should they ultimately fail, have likely gained more than those who never make such an attempt at all.

Is then, resisting the lure of material wealth and other trappings of what most would consider success a final, subtle test of sorts, to those who would become gods?

B32

*έν τὸ σοφὸν μόνον λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει καὶ ἐθέλει  
Ζηνὸς ὄνομα*

The wise is one only. It is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus.

And here he begins to get explicit. Once one has achieved wisdom, to stake their claim as being lifted above the common man is the final step, without falling to the hubris of actually assuming that one can now throw thunderbolts from atop Mount Olympus.

Achieving godhood, the third state of man (the first two being childhood, and adulthood) is of course a metaphor.

B33

*νόμος καὶ βουλῆ πείθεσθαι ἑνός*

And it is law, too, to obey the counsel of one.

That would, I assume, be a natural law, as Heraclitus was a big proponent of being one with nature.

B35

*χρὴ εἶ μάλα πολλῶν ἱστορας φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας εἶναι*

Men that love wisdom must be inquirers into very many things indeed.

I note here Heraclitus' use of the word inquirer, as opposed to suggesting that one must be an accumulator of knowledge.

That a broad base of inquiry is conducive to an active mind and, ultimately, in his terms, the pursuit of understanding and so becoming wise is pretty well established today, I think.

B36

*ψυχῆσι θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος  
γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ  
ψυχή*

For it is death to souls to become water, and death to water to become earth. But water comes from earth; and from water, soul.

My understanding here is that Heraclitus is saying that the death of the soul occurs when it ‘becomes water’, either in the dissolute, ‘wet soul’ model he later posits, or in the metaphoric sense in which the soul is dipped in the River Lethe, thus forgetting itself, while at the same time new souls come from this nothingness, be it in the form of dreams, or however else he might have meant it.

Have I mentioned that this is hard work? I do my best to avoid stretching too far to fit any given Fragment into the coherent, cohesive and compelling narrative that I hope I am building, and so have to give each one my best, as leaving too many Fragments in the ‘That which eludes me’ chapter would be counter-productive, but I am all too aware that,

on occasion, this being one of them, I may be reaching just a bit far. I've kept this one because, after sleeping on it, it feels right, if incomplete. Additional insight especially welcome here!

B45

*ψυχῆς πείρατα ἴων οὐκ ἂν ἐξέυροιο πᾶσαν  
ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει*

Traveling on every path, you will not find the boundaries of soul by going -- so deep is its measure.

Heraclitus the spiritualist. I don't have much more to add here, as I feel that his meaning is clear, and it fits neatly with what he has been expressing in the surrounding Fragments.

Whether he considered the souls of those who achieved godhood to be greater in measure than those of other men he doesn't make clear, but judging from the general tone of his writing on the subject, it seems likely to me.

He also, as Fragments yet to come express, the need to guard ones' soul, to care for it and respect it, by respecting oneself.

B62

*ἀθάνατοι θνητοί, θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι, ζῶντες τὸν  
ἐκείνων θάνατον, τὸν δὲ ἐκείνων βίον τεθνεώτες*

Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life.

Here Heraclitus makes reference to his own notion that man can, with sufficient wisdom, become immortal in the way that we understand everlasting fame or glory now, not in the literal sense.

When he says that one is 'living the others' death' and 'dying the others' life' he means that in transcending from man to god, and so living the death of mere adulthood, one symbolically lays rest to the one in favour of the other, while dying the others' life appears to me to be a poetic way of saying that, in the end, even the immortal is subject to the death of the man, sharing this much in the end.

B63

*ἔνθα δ' εἶναι ἐπανίστασθαι καὶ φύλακας γίνεσθαι  
ἐγερτὶ ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν*

... that they rise up and become the wakeful guardians of the living and the dead.

As tempting as a zombie metaphor might be, I believe Heraclitus is referring to those who have ascended to godhood.

B70

*παίδων ἀθύρματα νενόμικεν εἶναι τὰ ἀνθρώπινα  
δοξάσματα*

Human opinions are children's toys.

Again, here he is speaking of adults, of men who have yet to, or never will gain wisdom, and by so doing, ascend to godhood.

And so it is the opinions of the unenlightened, those who lack understanding, that he refers to as being children's toys. Amusing, certainly, and a fine distraction, but of no place at the table where the wise conduct their discourse.

B74

*οὐ δεῖ ὡς παιδᾶς τοκεῶνων, τοῦτ' ἔστι κατὰ ψιλόν·  
καθότι παρειλήφμεν*

We should not act and speak like 'children of our parents':  
i.e., in the way that has been handed down to us.

Heraclitus has already made the observation that, to those unenlightened men, they live, and pass on their condition to their children before dying.

Here he is rejecting the notion, and making clear his view that one must not continue this cycle, but rather seek wisdom and the understanding required to carve one's own path.

B78

*ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον  
δὲ ἔχει*

The way of man has no wisdom, but that of God has.

Stating it plainly, if one is aware what to look for: Man is not wise, but gods are, and it is the quality which differentiates between them.

Again, a little uncomfortable with the single entity that the capitalized God implies, and my fumbling with Google Translate suggests, likely erroneously as I no doubt

provided insufficient context, the word ‘goddess’ in its place.

Whatever the details there, and I welcome any and all clarification and/or context, I doubt, as always, that Heraclitus was referring to the Christian God in any of his words.

B79

*ἀνὴρ νήπιος ἤκουσε πρὸς δαίμονος ὅκωσπερ παῖς  
πρὸς ἀνδρός*

Man is called a baby by God, even as a child is (called a baby) by a man.

Once again, Heraclitus expressing his views on there being three states of human being; childhood, then adulthood, and ultimately godhood, and that the latter looks to the man who lacks wisdom as being a child by comparison.

B83

*ἀνθρώπων ὁ σοφώτατος πρὸς θεὸν πίθηκος  
φανέται καὶ σοφίαι καὶ κάλλει καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν*

The wisest of men, in contrast to God, appears as an ape in wisdom and beauty and all things.

Heraclitus banging that drum again, albeit in an even less flattering manner (for mankind) in saying that the wisest of men, in contrast to a god, which is to imply one who lacks proper wisdom, as that is the qualification for godhood, is equivalent to an ape to the eyes of man.

B85

*θυμῶ μάχεσθαι χαλεπόν· ὁ γὰρ ἂν θέλη, ψυχῆς ὠνεῖται*

It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire. Whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of soul.

A sobering thought, and one which suggests that man is either at the mercy of his innermost, or basest desires, or the suggestion that a wise man find some measure of accord with his heart's desire.

Or is it, here unsaid, that once man has ascended to godhood, the wisdom he has accrued is sufficient to resist the heart's advances?

I wonder, whatever the case might be, what Heraclitus' heart's desire was, and whether he reached an accord with it, or was he ultimately lost to it, just as he warns others will be?

Reading what I have concerning his life, he certainly doesn't give the impression of having gotten what he wanted. Or perhaps he did, and as he notes in another Fragment, 'it is not good for men to receive all that they desire'?

B86

*(ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν θείων τὰ πολλά, καθ' Ἡράκλειτον,) ἀπιστίη διαφυγγάνει μὴ γιγνώσκεσθαι*

(But the greater part of things divine, according to Heraclitus,) escape recognition due to lack of confidence.

I interpret Heraclitus here as suggesting that most who might otherwise achieve wisdom, and with it godhood, as follows in his view, ultimately fail to grasp it due to a lack of confidence in their own understanding.

Again, a final test of sorts, perhaps?

B87

*βλάξ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ παντὶ λόγῳ ἐπτοῆσθαι φιλεῖ*

The fool is fluttered at every word.

Yet another expression of disdain for the common man, that he, being foolish (particularly lacking in wisdom) can be easily manipulated, or even that they chase after every stray notion, like a dog chasing a car.

B88

*ταῦτό τ' ἔνι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκὸς καὶ (τὸ) ἐγρηγορὸς  
καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ  
μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστι κακείνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα  
ταῦτα*

And it is the same thing in us that is quick and dead, awake and asleep, young and old; the former are shifted and become the latter, and the latter in turn are shifted and become the former.

Here we have Heraclitus declaring that in all things, sleeping, waking, young and old, alive and dead, that man is one, merely shifting in state along the paths we are destined to follow.

That he makes no mention of those who attain godhood, in his eyes, is significant. Either he reserved a separate portion for such men, or he recognized that, whatever measure of divine wisdom they may have attained, they remain subject to the same evolutions as their fellows.

B92

*Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι καθ' Ἡράκλειτον  
ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα  
φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν  
θεόν*

And the Sibyl, with raving lips uttering things mirthless, unbedizened, and unperfumed, reaches over a thousand years with her voice, thanks to the god in her.

Heraclitus is apparently the first person on record to mention the Sybil, though accounts of ‘frenzied women from whose lips the god speaks’ were apparently recorded much earlier in the near East, with Assyria cited as one such source according to Walter Burkett.

The Sibyl apparently served the god Apollo, to whom the oracle at Delphi was dedicated. As the god of many

concepts, including but not limited to music, poetry, art, oracles, plague, medicine, sun, light and knowledge, his lessons, as passed through his oracle, would seem be of particular interest to Heraclitus.

How the Weeping Sage reconciled the notion of an actual, mythical, lightning bolt-throwing god with his belief that man attains godhood when he achieves a certain measure of wisdom is not clear, nor is his devoutness if so, though he certainly appears to respect the oracle.

I suspect that he used the term godhood as metaphor, as was his wont, and that he made the distinction between the human become divine, and the gods of myth and legend, though if he did so explicitly, it would appear to have been lost to time and the damage to *On Nature*.

Whether Heraclitus ever consulted with the oracle is not made clear, though his words suggest that he had more than a passing acquaintance, and one imagines that, given the level of respect, if not flattery, apparent in his words, that he would likely have availed himself of the opportunity to do so.

Whether or not he shared any insights thus gleaned has apparently been lost with the damage to *On Nature*, if he chose to disclose these details at all.

B93

*ὁ ἄναξ οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει  
οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει*

The lord whose is the oracle at Delphi neither speaks nor hides his meaning, but gives a sign.

As mentioned in the preceding Fragment, the lord at Delphi was Apollo. That he doesn't speak is likely enough, as Heraclitus makes no known claims to have had direct contact with the gods of myth and legend.

That he does not, however, hide his meaning, but rather communicates it in the form of a sign, is a notion that quite likely appealed to Heraclitus, reflecting as it does his own habit of using metaphor to impart his teachings.

Just what signs he may have received, and what he made of them, must remain tantalizingly out of reach, matter for conjecture.

It is recounted in Browne’s Miscellany Tract On Oracles that Heraclitus tells us that ‘Nature successively produces the universe out of herself and herself out of the universe, bartering “fire for things and things for fire, as goods for gold and gold for goods,” but he is not clear whether or not Heraclitus claimed to have gained this insight from the oracle.

Discovering the details of his visit(s), and at what point in his life they took place could provide both clarity and context, but alas, I have been unable to discover this information.

B98

*αἱ ψυχαὶ ὀσμῶνται καθ' Ἄιδην*

Souls smell in Hades.

I infer from this that in Hades, souls decompose, much as their mortal shells do in the material world.

B102

*τῶ μὲν θεῶ καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια,  
ἄνθρωποι δὲ ἅ μὲν ἄδικα ὑπειλήφασιν ἅ δὲ δίκαια*

To God all things are fair and good and just, but men hold some things wrong and some right.

While I am once again a bit twitchy at the reference to a singular God here, I'll merely note my hesitation as such and continue. The body of the Fragment doesn't appear to be particularly Christian in its content and moral tone, in any event.

To Heraclitus, with his belief in a singular, underlying truth, and that wisdom is recognizing it for what it is, and that this represents man's evolving to a third, and final state of being, that being of course godhood, then logically all things follow that underlying truth, and in so doing obey and personify natural law, then all things would, by doing so, be 'fair and good and just', just as they would transcend lesser (read: mortal) efforts at grasping them.

B104

*τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν νόος ἢ φρήν· δῆμων ἀοιδοῖσι  
πεῖθονται καὶ διδασκάλῳ χρεῖωνται ὁμίλῳ οὐκ εἰδότες  
ὅτι "οἱ πολλοὶ κακοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί"*

For what thought or wisdom have they? They follow the poets and take the crowd as their teacher, knowing not that "the many are bad and few good."

Once again Heraclitus demonstrates his low opinion of the common man, dismissing them as being foolish enough to follow poets, whom as we have seen, are held in low esteem by Heraclitus as distorters of the truth made all the more dangerous by their popular appeal, and that they 'take the crowd as their teacher' or, in other words, fail to think for themselves, and in this they fail to recognize that only a few among them have anything of worth to impart.

B107

*κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὦτα  
βαρβάρους ψυχὰς ἐχόντων*

Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men who have barbarian souls.

The ancient Greeks called foreigners barbarians, uncouth, uncivilized And so we may presume that to possess a barbarian soul is to lack wisdom, and by extension, understanding.

Lacking such essential understanding then, it would follow that the evidence of their senses could not be relied upon, because the minds behind them lacked the proper tools to interpret what might be seen and heard, and so also fail to distinguish what is important in the record of their senses.

B113

*ξυνόν ἐστι πᾶσι τὸ φρονέειν*

Thought is common to all.

Here Heraclitus asserts that thinking is inherent to the human condition.

He does not, however, imply that all thinkers are equal.

B115

*ψυχῆς ἐστι λόγος ἑαυτὸν αὔξων*

The Lógos of the soul is increasing itself.

Heraclitus appears to be suggesting that the soul is, to some extent, independent of the mind, and that it has its own reason, its own understanding of those truths which are common to all, and that understanding them, and

presumably imparting this wisdom to the man whose soul is at work, is its ultimate goal:

The pursuit of godhood, and thus immortality, be it of a literal or metaphoric nature.

Thus far Heraclitus has identified, in addition to the mind, both the heart and soul, if they are not the same, expressed differently in his various passages. as being possessed of some degree of sentience, which may at times work at odds with the rational mind, but ultimately, at least in the case of the soul, to be working towards goals beneficial to the man in guiding him towards understanding, wisdom and eventual godhood.

B116

*ἀνθρώποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἑωυτοὺς καὶ σωφρονεῖν*

Recognizing oneself and being of a sound mind are for all men.

What strikes me here is what is left unsaid. That there were, and certainly still are men who are not of sound mind. I follow this logic, as it relates to the three stages of man, to

infer that failing to recognize oneself, and by this I assume Heraclitus meant recognizing oneself in their words and actions, not when looking in a mirror, would classify those not of sound mind as being children, not adults, much as being drunk does.

Which suggests to me that, to Heraclitus, those not of sound mind are, in short, not viewed as being responsible for themselves, and therefore not being adults, but rather to be treated as children, a notion which survives, in essentially unchanged form, to this day.



9

## FIRE AND WATER

Heraclitus makes frequent reference to fire, as being a destructive, cleansing force, or the source of creation, as well as, I am confident enough to assert, in the very same metaphorical senses that are universally recognized today.

As the source of inspiration, the spark of invention, mankind's seizing that which had been forbidden

Which, of course, brings Prometheus to mind as being the embodiment of these notions to this day, and certainly in Heraclitus' time. Why this has not been posited before (to the best of my knowledge) is puzzling to me, as it is such an obvious, yet powerful image, and one I can't believe the Weeping Sage would neglect in his writing on the topic.

And then there is his somewhat murkier mentions of water, which I struggled with, beyond the obvious references to sobriety. I was in fact getting ready to relegate those Fragments to the pile of those which elude me when, at last, I believe I stumbled upon the relevant metaphors in the rivers Styx and Lethe of Ancient Greek mythology. The one representing death, the other forgetfulness, a loss of self.

I leave it to the reader to judge whether I am in fact hitting the right notes, or whether in these as in all cases my reach might have exceeded my grasp, in my efforts to construct a consistent and culturally relevant narrative.

B30

*κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν  
οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ  
ἔσται πῦρ ἀείζων, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ  
ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα*

This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made. But it always was, is, and will be: an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out.

According to their own creation myths, it wasn't the gods, but rather the titans who created the world, only to be overthrown by their offspring, who took for themselves aspects of creation and reality. While Hephaestus, the god of the forge, was also the god of fire, and unique among the gods in his imperfection, cast out of heaven on account of it, it seems to me that here Heraclitus speaks of this ever-living fire in terms of that spark of creation, the world home

to those measures of it, in the form of men (and gods, in Heraclitus' use of the term) being gifted with a measure of this divine inspiration, each according to his measure, kindling and going out with their births and passing.

That he takes care to differentiate here from the literal spark of creation, that brought about the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars, seems significant to me in that he is laying the boundary between human accomplishment and the natural world, which was of course a source of fascination to him, and that his convictions with regards to the underlying truth(s) governing all things hold them to be an expression of, to borrow a phrase, natural law, though he doesn't explicitly refer to it as such in any Fragment or reference I have found.

Still, it seems apparent that he took pains to make clear the difference between the truly divine acts of creation, and those which are within man's reach. Whether further Fragments suggest that fire is in some way involved in man's ascension from human to god will be interesting to discover.

And in so saying, of course, I state the bias I might inadvertently bring to my interpretations in this chapter, the one in which I am least certain of my overall understanding, though certain of the Fragments seem plain enough in their meaning to me.

B31

*πυρὸς τροπαὶ πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δὲ τὸ μὲν ἥμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἥμισυ πρηστήρ ...*

*θάλασσα διαχέεται καὶ μετρέεται εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον ὁκοῖος πρόσθεν ἦν ἢ γενέσθαι γῆ*

The transformations of Fire: first, sea; and of the sea half is earth, half whirlwind ...

Sea pours out, and is measured by the same amount as before it became earth.

These being particularly timely examples of Heraclitus' words which vex me, in that they don't quite fail to evoke in me powerful imagery, but that I can't easily take a coherent lesson from them.

For now I am forced to conclude that either Heraclitus was writing literally, recording his own beliefs regarding the

creation of all things, or that his metaphor in these instances escape me.

That said, and here I must remind that my grasp of the sciences is sketchy at best, but the notion of a fire that creates does remind me of the one scientific equation that I am aware of which might suggest something in the same vein, that being Einstein's famous  $E=MC^2$ , in which he proves (insofar as I am able to understand him) that matter and energy are one and the same, or at least that they are interchangeable on some level.

If Plato is somewhat generously given some credit for positing something resembling atomic theory with his notion of Platonic ideals, then it seems equally fair to consider according Heraclitus with a similar first grasp of theoretical physics.

Otherwise, here I have nothing.

B65

*καλεῖ δὲ αὐτὸ χρησιμοσύνην καὶ κόρον*

(Heraclitus calls it (i.e., fire)) want and surfeit.

Here, on the other hand, I find myself on firmer footing. If fire represents divine inspiration, or human genius, or that which separates man from god, then it would certainly be to be desired, as there can never be too much fulfilling of human potential.

And at the same time, it could be said that it might rest dormant, or untapped, in all but the most exceptional of minds, and so there would be a surfeit of it, even as those unfulfilled potentials thus expressed might inspire a wanting for more.

B66

*πάντα γάρ τὸ πῦρ ἐπελθὼν κρινεῖ καὶ καταλήψεται*  
Fire in its advance will judge and convict all things.

Again, while he may have been writing in the literal sense here, an observation of fire's endless hunger and destructive power, this seems clumsy to me, and at odds with Heraclitus' apparent reverence for the element, or at least for employing it as a metaphor for some deeper lesson.

If, as I think has been established, that the gaining of wisdom, the ability to see the underlying truths common to

all is the mark of a man become a god, in Heraclitus' three stages of being, and given his rather strict moral stances as laid out rather clearly in the following chapter, then the metaphor this suggests to me is that of a wise and moral god's role among lesser men.

But it seems equally likely to me that he was again writing of his beliefs regarding the gods and the supernatural world around him.

The obvious image that this invokes to me, at least, is the crucible, the flame in which all things are made, or unmade.

B67

*ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος  
εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός (τὰναντία ἅπαντα· οὗτος ὁ νοῦς),  
ἀλλοιοῦται δὲ ὅκωσπερ πῦρ, ὅποταν συμμιγῆ  
θυώμασιν, ὀνομάζεται καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐκάστου*

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger; but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savor of each.

I considered re-assigning this Fragment to the unity of opposites chapter, but while it bears an obvious conceptual commonality with Heraclitus' views on what may be summed up as two sides of the same coin, here he mentions the mutable nature of apparently literal fire, as in cooking.

B89

*ὁ Ἡράκλειτός φησι τοῖς ἐγρηγορόσιν ἓνα καὶ κοινὸν κόσμον εἶναι τῶν δὲ κοιμωμένων ἕκαστον εἰς ἴδιον ἀποστρέφεσθαι*

The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own.

Poetically phrased, and how true! While the waking world is, indeed, common to all, particularly if one considers Heraclitus' conviction that there is an underlying, universal truth which only the wise, those who have, in his thinking, become gods, can see, and are thus moved to act upon accordingly, he recognizes that, while dreaming, man is both cut off from the shared existence of his waking hours, and that, while dreaming, he is free to

explore vistas otherwise unimagined, but that while doing so, he walks alone.

B90

*πυρὸς τε ἀνταμοιβὴ τὰ πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἀπάντων  
ὄκωσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων χρυσός*

All things are an interchange for Fire, and Fire for all things,  
just like goods for gold and gold for goods.

Here Heraclitus refers to the divine spark, the fire stolen by Prometheus and given to man, for which the gods punished him.

This divine fire is what fuels man's creativity, his imagination, his drive to build, and to learn.

On a more common note, fire, as Heraclitus mentioned with regards to cooking, takes on the flavour of the spices used, and so it also is changed in the act of a smith's forging, giving itself to the act of creation and so becoming that which it contributed to the creation of.

Alternately, and I humbly ask the reader's indulgence here, he may have been intuiting what Einstein would later prove with his theory of relativity, and the equation  $E=MC^2$ , that energy and matter are, in essence, interchangeable, just as Plato's notion of 'Platonic ideals' has been credited

by some as being perhaps the beginning of atomic theory. If that is to be credited, then it seems to me that this flight of fancy might be given the same serious consideration.

The reader's mileage, of course and as always, may vary here.

B117

*ανήρ όκόταν μεθυσθῆ, ἄγεται ὑπό παιδός ανήβου  
σφαλλόμενος, οὐκ ἐπαΐων όκη βαίνει, ὑγρήν τήν  
ψυχήν ἔχων*

A man, when he gets drunk, is led by a beardless lad, tripping, knowing not where he steps, having his soul moist.

The 'beardless lad' in this case, of course, being the man himself, reduced by his intoxication to the state of childhood, as reflected in Heraclitus' three stages of man.

Not knowing where he steps implies both the usual impairments associated with being drunk, as well as a disconnect from the adult world, and the commonality of experience it implies.

Lastly, in referring to a moist soul, and with his other, to me less decipherable references to water, I posit that this is

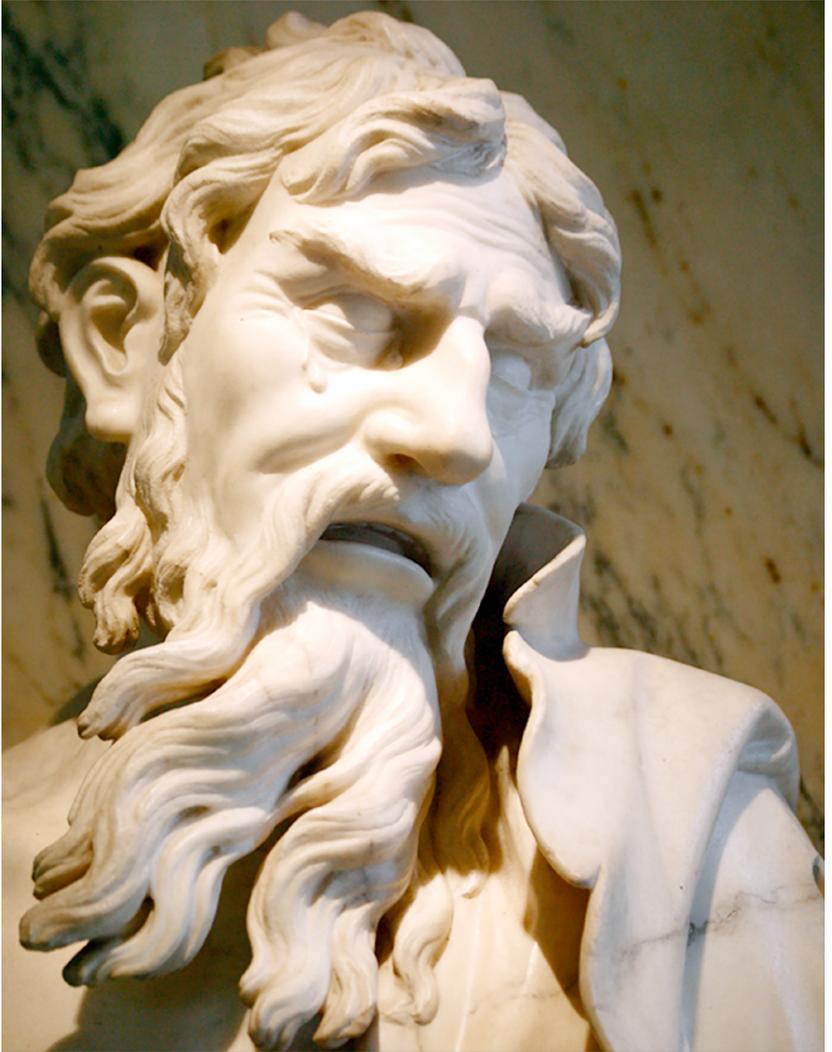
metaphor, implying that he has dipped in the waters of the River Lethe of Greek mythology – the River of Forgetfulness.

B118

*αυγή ξηρή ψυχή σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη*

A dry gleam of light is the wisest and best soul.

Whereas by contrast, Heraclitus asserts, a dry soul, with its gleam of light representing that divine fire, the spark of creation which, apparently, is temporarily extinguished when the soul becomes wet, is the ‘best’ soul, and the one most capable of achieving a measure of wisdom, in accordance to its part.



10

## MORALITY AND ETHICS

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*While it is unusual for Heraclitus to make mention of knowing, it seems possible to me that this is but one possible translation, and that the word 'recognize' might be the correct one here.*

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While reading through the Fragments, and from what few glimpses into his life I was afforded by other sources while researching this work, it seems clear that Heraclitus was, or considered himself to be of a high moral fibre, and of the strictest ethical standards, all as judged by the standards of his day and place, of course.

As such, these topics play an important role in his writing *On Nature*, and where these matters are concerned, he is much less playful with his words, much more direct, as it is obvious that he intends these lessons to be learned by any who read them, although I find irony in his being so explicitly specific that he provides examples that would in all likelihood be familiar subjects to his readers, but who are today somewhat more obscure.

Still, he was a strong proponent of civic duty, of self-mastery, and restraint, of sober comportment and, all in all,

if truth be told he seems rather prudish, or even Puritan, though of course without the devotion to a Christian God.

Of course many readers may find these to be admirable traits, and I would be the last to dispute this, even as I acknowledge that my own leanings tend to be more liberal, certainly less judgmental, at least where standards of personal comportment are concerned.

In matters of ethics, however, I am in full agreement with the uncompromising Heraclitus. As, it appears, was Socrates, who embraced his teachings, as well as, insofar as I have not studied him extensively, might also have Aristotle, whose own teachings appear to me to focus on the more practical, worldly sorts of observations.

Plato, according to my readings to–date, seemed to accord Socrates the mantle of ethical scholar, while his own teachings ranged more into the realm of ideas. If so, and if we acknowledge (as does Socrates himself) that the man who straddled Heraclitus’ teachings and the instruction of younger Plato was overwhelmingly concerned with ethics, even as he sought to teach understanding, and so frequently

used the moral failings of his neighbours as ill-received teaching moments, then it seems likely that Socrates' own morals and ethics, his values, were influenced to some extent by Heraclitus, who as we will establish in the chapter devoted to Socrates, acknowledged the Weeping Sage as an influence, both openly and more subtly, as he brought metaphor into play when making reference to his teacher who, as we are discovering, made extensive use of that form in his own teachings, not the least of which to filter out the undeserving.

That his unwavering moral compass must have, in much the same way it aggravated Socrates' neighbours, been a source of much consternation to Heraclitus' fellows, though his apparently highly-born social status likely kept him safe from suffering a fate similar to that which befell his eventual pupil. It must be said that the tone of Heraclitus' writings, and the tale of his years, culminating as they did with him taking leave of society to live as a hermit and, ultimately, dying alone suggests to me that his life was far from a happy one, and this disgruntlement, coupled with an

apparently misanthropic nature, is likely what got him labelled as the ‘Weeping Sage’. I suspect that, much like other seminal personalities to follow with whom I share sympathy, namely Michelangelo and John Lennon, his love of humanity may have driven him to produce his book, in an effort to uplift those who studied him, without necessarily making of him a sympathetic figure where individual people were concerned.

Coupled with his openly embracing conflict, which of course was valued in the ancient world, as opposed to the much less martial tone the readers’ current generations are adopting, this would seem to make of him a harsh, distant, unforgiving man, and if so then it certainly explains his apparent dissatisfaction with the world around him, and the people who populated it.

If so, he has my much belated sympathies, as someone who is well acquainted with feeling alienated from most of one’s fellows, if for altogether different reasons. Still, one cannot help but admire those both possessed of strong convictions, and the courage to see them through.

I expect the remainder of this chapter will prove rather short, as his quotes on these subjects are relatively few and, as mentioned, he tends to be much more direct in addressing these topics.

B15

*εἰ μὴ γὰρ Διονύσω πομπὴν ἐποιοῦντο καὶ ὕμνεον  
ἄσμα αἰδοίοισιν, ἀναιδέστατα εἴργαστ' ἄν· ὡτὸς δὲ  
Ἄϊδης καὶ Διόνυσος, ὅτεω μαίνονται καὶ ληναῖζουσιν*

For if it were not to Dionysus that they made a procession and sang the shameful phallic hymn, they would be acting most shamelessly. But Hades is the same as Dionysus in whose honour they go mad and rave.

Here Heraclitus might be asserting that Hades and Dionysus are effectively the same, in that their followers pursue their ‘mysteries’ (which, according to Heraclitus, they being mortal would be by definition unholy in nature), though careful parsing of his words does not necessarily imply that they are the same in going mad and raving.

The second possibility, and one supported by preliminary reading on the author’s part, is that he is

asserting that Dionysus and Hades are in fact one and the same, a theory that has been posited more than once as far as I have been able to read. As this is not a discourse intended to span all of ancient Greek beliefs, I will leave further investigation, or insight to the reader, and repeat what I believe to be the relevant passage:

*“For if it were not to Dionysus that they made a procession and sang the shameful phallic hymn, they would be acting most shamelessly.”*

It seems to me that Heraclitus is actually granting those observing the worship of the god Dionysus something of an exemption from his usual, rather prudish moral standards. ‘If not for, then they would be acting shamelessly’. If so, it suggests a degree of religious tolerance, perhaps linked to Heraclitus’ as-yet unexamined views on the Oracle at Delphi and other acts or writings that straddle the line between religious observation and superstition. He clearly had no patience for the latter, as is expressed in his opinion of Hesiod.

B28

δοκέοντα γὰρ ὁ δοκιμώτατος γινώσκει, φυλάσσει·  
 (καὶ μέντοι καὶ) Δίκη καταλήφεται ψευδῶν τέκτονας  
 καὶ μάρτυρας

The most esteemed of them knows – holds fast to – fancies.

Justice shall overtake the artificers of lies and the false witnesses.

This incompletely expressed notion appears likely to be, in the missing middle part, suggesting that the most esteemed of (them being men?) knows what is important, while the rest hold fast to their fancies.

While it is unusual for Heraclitus to make mention of knowing, it seems possible to me that this is but one possible translation, and that the word ‘recognize’ might be the correct one here.

That justice shall overtake liars and bearers of false witness is fully in harmony with Heraclitus’ expressed views as to how such criminals should be punished.

B39

*ἐν Πριήνῃ Βίας ἐγένετο ὁ Τευτάμεω, οὗ πλείων  
λόγος ἢ τῶν ἄλλων*

In Priene lived Bias, son of Teutamas, who is of more account than the rest.

My research reveals Bias of Priene to have been a very significant philosopher, one of the Seven Sages of Greece, and one of only four unanimously so honoured.

Reading his famous, or surviving quotations, I can easily see why Heraclitus was drawn to him and, in all likelihood, heavily influenced by him.

Certainly, in this expression of praise, rare indeed from the Ephesian misanthrope, one can but recognize credit given where due.

B43

*ὑβριν χρὴ σβεννύναι μᾶλλον ἢ πυρκαϊήν*

Wantonness needs putting out, even more than a house on fire.

Heraclitus was noted for his stiff-necked views on morality and personal conduct, and here we see him

demonstrating this, though why wantonness, in particular, had earned his ire is not evident from the surrounding text.

Perhaps because it suggests violating the tenets of marriage, which seems like the sort of act that would rouse him, as well as the lack of self-discipline that such lascivious behaviour implies.

B44

*μάχεσθαι χρὴ τὸν δῆμον ὑπὲρ τοῦ νόμου ὅκωσπερ  
τείχεος*

The people must fight for its law as for its walls.

It's a shame that the likes of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams were never presented with a cohesive take on Heraclitus. I rather suspect that they'd find in him a kindred spirit, and that his views on learning and wisdom, as well as on laws might have informed their own.

But clearly he considers peoples' law, by which I assume he meant what he would refer to as natural law, to be paramount to a society's safety and well-being, thoughts which current events do nothing to contest.

B49

*εἷς ἐμοὶ μύριοι, εἴαν ἄριστος ᾦ*

One is ten thousand to me, if he be the best.

Again, he's not being especially cryptic here.

B95

*ἀμαθίην κρύπτειν ἄμεινον*

It is best to hide folly.

I don't expect he was addressing the wise here, but rather those seekers after wisdom who might read his words.

If I were to venture a guess as to why he might think it best to hide ones' follies, other than the obvious protecting of ones' reputation, it would be that in so doing, one would be removing not merely evidence from the public eye, but also an example that other fools might follow, thus spreading the original offence.

B106

*Ἡράκλειτος ἐπέπληξεν Ἡσιόδῳ τὰς μὲν ἀγαθὰς ποιουμένῳ, τὰς δὲ φαύλας, ὡς ἀγνοοῦντι φύσιν ἡμέρας ἀπάσης μίαν οὔσαν*

Heraclitus attacked Hesiod for making some days good and other days bad, because he did not recognize that the nature of every day is one.

Completely consistent with Heraclitus’ previously stated views, particularly concerning the presence of an underlying truth which must be recognized, and in refuting such superstitious and sensationalist notions as holding certain days as being more or less auspicious, just as he did Homer’s epic poetry, to pick a single example.

B110

ἀνθρώποις γίνεσθαι ὀκόσα θέλουσιν οὐκ ἄμεινον

It is not better for men to get all they wish to get.

A commonly expressed sentiment, that man is better off not getting everything he wants, which couples nicely with Heraclitus’ other nearby Fragments, and his as I understand it possibly mis–quoted assertion that:

*“It is hard to contend against one’s heart’s desire; for whatever it wishes to have it buys at the cost of soul.”*

B119

Ἡράκλειτος ἔφη ὡς ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων

Heraclitus said that a man’s character is his fate.

Given the prevailing notion that ones’ fate is sealed, and that it can’t be avoided, this would imply that to Heraclitus,

either ones' character is similarly set in stone, or that it is not, in which case ones' fate is also not fixed, but that in either event the two are intertwined, the one serving to define the other.

Modern expressions such as 'You reap what you sow', etc., show that this notion has persisted, whether or not it originated with Heraclitus, through the centuries, and remains ingrained in Western culture.

B121

*ἄξιον Ἐφεσίοις ἠβηδὸν ἀπάγξασθαι πᾶσι καὶ τοῖς ἀνήβοις τὴν πόλιν καταλιπεῖν, οἷτινες Ἑρμόδωρον ἄνδρα ἐωυτῶν ὀνήιστον ἐξέβαλον φάντες· ἡμέων μηδὲ εἰς ὀνήιστος ἔστω, εἰ δὲ μή, ἄλλη τε καὶ μετ' ἄλλων*

The Ephesians would do well to hang themselves, every grown man of them, and leave the city to beardless lads; for they have cast out Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying, "We will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others."

What little I can find concerning Hermodorus has him being a philosopher as well, with two books to his credit; *On Mathematics* and *On Plato*.

These titles, coupled with his apparent efforts at circulating the work of Plato, lead me to question the authenticity of this Fragment as, firstly, Heraclitus is fairly well established as not being much interested in mathematics, or other such forms of knowledge and, of course, the fact that Plato was not born until several decades after Heraclitus' passing.

Of course, there could well be another, less easily discovered Hermodorus, but if not, it looks suspiciously to me as though Plato, or so as not to be too harsh, some admirer of his may have stitched together a couple of Heraclitus' existing Fragments, notably B<sub>49</sub> and B<sub>125</sub>–A, and so attributed to the Weeping Sage an indirect, or at least implied approval of Plato that would otherwise be a chronological impossibility.

But there might well have been another, as yet undiscovered by me Hermodorus. If not, it seems to me that someone was being clever.

B125-A

*μὴ ἐπιλίπτοι ὑμᾶς πλοῦτος, ἔφη, Ἐφέσιοι, ἵν' ἐξελέγχοισθε πονηρευόμενοι*

May your wealth not let you down, Ephesians, that you might be convicted of being scoundrels.

Heraclitus being openly sarcastic here, as he suggests that the Ephesians' wicked ways were such that only their great wealth insulated them from being prosecuted for their crimes.

This notion is, sadly, one that has persisted to the present day. One can only imagine what he might have to say were he alive today.

Or whether, had he been better understood in antiquity, his philosophies regarding moral and ethical conduct might have curbed some of Western society's current excesses.

# Γνώσεις Gnóseis Knowledge

## 11

### KNOWLEDGE

In spite of his emphasis on understanding as the key to wisdom, Heraclitus wasn't against knowledge of itself, or for its own sake. He simply had a firm grasp of its potential benefits and the dangers it presents to those lacking wisdom, and he pursued several lines of inquiry accordingly.

The workings of the solar system appear to have been a favourite topic of his, as demonstrated by the Fragments in this chapter. He appears to have been interested in these

celestial workings in order to better understand the passing of the seasons, and years, but he clearly drew a distinction between astronomy, which he seems to have practiced to some extent, and astrology, which he dismissed as being of no value, as shown by his comments in these fragments.

While Heraclitus had rather famously harsh things to say to those who, like Pythagoras, were consumed by the pursuit of knowledge to the apparent detriment of wisdom and understanding, the following Fragments reveal that his inquiries did in fact delve into the realm of knowing, specifically what we would refer to as the sciences, although at first glance he appeared not to have a very high opinion of maths.

His quests for knowledge appear to be with some tangible benefit firmly in mind, as opposed to unfettered intellectual meanderings, although we only have his few, fragmented words to go by on this topic.

But Heraclitus appears to have been, above all else, a practical man, and one whose apparent wealth or position

in society would permit him to indulge his curiosity however he pleased.

What I would be curious to know then, is whether Heraclitus came to the sciences early in life, during his prime, or towards the end of the period marked by his writing *On Nature*.

It would, if nothing else, inform the reader concerning the evolution of his attitudes, as expressed by his famous, and often scathing words to such contemporaries as the aforementioned Pythagoras, Homer, and others whose intellects took them on paths which diverged from his own.

Steve Jobs famously said he would ‘trade all of his technology for an afternoon with Socrates’. I am, after all, writing this book in his memory, and with the wistful notion that, through Heraclitus, and to an extent Socrates’ words as well, when read in this new context, perhaps I could have offered him something *Insanely Great* in return for everything his technology has afforded me:

The chance to really blow his mind.

Think Different indeed. But I digress.

I would, I think, offer a great deal, although I would have to trade in something other than material wealth, for a chance to meet Heraclitus in the latter stage of his life, before his illness and subsequent death of course.

I would be very interested in learning whether, and if so how, he might have mellowed, and what if any new avenues of thought he might have explored after he'd put down his quill (stylus?) and so retired from his career as a writer.

I think I would be most curious to learn what he might ask of me, not as a fellow seeker of wisdom, but merely as one living in a future such as he likely never could have imagined on so many levels, and yet one which, at its core, I very much suspect that he would have recognized.

B6

ὁ ἥλιος ... καθάπερ ὁ Ἡράκλειτός φησι, νέος ἐφ'  
ἡμέρη ἐστίν

The sun ... as Heraclitus says, is new every day.

I wasn't certain whether to include this here, or in the Fire And Water chapter, but ultimately I chose to use it to set the table for his more obviously knowledge–seeing Fragments, as this pretty clearly expresses his understanding of how things worked, in the pre–heliocentric world view.

It is also a further expression of his belief that there are no auspicious or inauspicious days, that none of that is predetermined, but rather that each day the sun rises to illuminate new possibilities.

B38

δοκεῖ (Θαλής) δὲ κατὰ τινὰς πρώτους  
ἀστρολογῆσαι ... μαρτυρεῖ δ' αὐτῷ καὶ Ἡράκλειτος  
καὶ Δημόκριτος

(Thales), according to some, seems to have been the first student of astronomy ... a fact that both Heraclitus and Democritus bear witness to.

This would seem to further support the notion that Heraclitus was interested in astronomy, both by his apparently attesting to Thales' primacy in the field, and the glaring lack of any kind of withering comment directed his way by the Weeping Sage.

B61

*θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθαρῶτατον καὶ μαρώτατον.  
ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον, ἀνθρώποις δὲ  
ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον*

The sea is the purest and the impurest water. Fish can drink it, and it is good for them; to men it is undrinkable and destructive.

An observer of the natural world. That this should be so is anything but surprising. And what he says here is undeniably so, though without the context provided by any surrounding passages, I fear it must stand on its own, and not be part of some larger point.

B94

*Ἥλιος οὐχ ὑπερβήσεται μέτρα· εἰ δὲ μή, Ἐρινύες  
μιν Δίκης ἐπίκουροι ἐξευρήσουσιν*

The sun will not overstep his measures; if he does, the Erinyes, the handmaids of Justice, will find him out.

Just as Einstein grappled with the existence of God while formulating his theorem, here we have Heraclitus integrating the beliefs of his time with his efforts to understand the universe.

The notion of the Erinyes as ‘handmaids of Justice’ must have dovetailed well with his conviction that there are underlying truths which inform the wise as to what is real; the notion that the gods would appoint agents to see to the sun’s compliance with those truths seems fully in keeping with his other beliefs.

Alternately, they could be yet another of his metaphors, using the commonly held beliefs of the time to support his assertion that everything follows his underlying truths. The notion of natural law would seem to fit nicely into this view of the world around him.

B99

*εἰ μὴ ἥλιος ἦν, ἔνεκα τῶν ἄλλων ἀστρῶν εὐφρόνη  
ἂν ἦν*

If there were no sun, on account of the other stars it would be night.

More astronomy, and as accurate a take on things as any of his day, given the limits of human understanding where the solar system was then concerned.

That he refers to ‘other stars’ also suggests that he recognized that the sun was itself a star, albeit likely understood to be the closest one to, or otherwise most concerned with, Earth.

If he failed to grasp the sun’s influence on the seasons, as well as its providing needed heat, in addition to light, it can be argued that he still managed a respectable grasp of the nascent field of astronomy.

B100

*περιόδους· ὧν ὁ ἥλιος ἐπιστάτης ὧν καὶ σκοπὸς  
ὀρίζειν καὶ βραβεύειν καὶ ἀναδεικνύειν καὶ ἀναφαίνειν*

μεταβολὰς καὶ ὥρας αἱ πάντα φέρουσι καθ'  
Ἡράκλειτον

... the cycles: of these the sun is commander and overseer, for determining the changes and the seasons which carry all things.

And here he is according the sun its rightful place as arbiter of the seasons. My mistake for writing hastily, above, left unedited to further illustrate the folly in leaping before one looks, as it were.

B103

ξυνὸν γὰρ ἀρχὴ καὶ πέρασ ἐπὶ κύκλου περιφερείας

Concerning the circumference of a circle the beginning and end are common.

While perhaps not demonstrating a Euclidean command of geometry, he certainly isn't mistaken. Perhaps that's as much as he felt he needed to know concerning circles, or perhaps his further thoughts on the matter have been lost.

Either way, this Fragment illustrates that Heraclitus didn't confine himself to astronomy in his pursuit of knowledge.

B105

*ἀστρολόγον φησὶ τὸν Ὅμηρον*

(Heraclitus) said that Homer was an astronomer.

Google Translate has '*ἀστρολόγον*' as meaning astrologer, not astronomer, which would be more in line with what I would expect to read from Heraclitus concerning Homer, for whom he has already established his dislike, and expressed his opinion that Homer should be punished for, in essence, failing to tell the truth.

That he would consider Homer to be an astrologer, a practice for which he doubtless held little respect, seems much more in line with his established views, and so I will submit my version as being accurate and representative unless and until a linguistic authority more widely respected than Google's software corrects me on this matter.

B120

*ἡοῦς καὶ ἑσπέρας τέρματα ἢ ἄρκτος καὶ ἀντίον τῆς  
ἄρκτου οὐρος αἰθρίου Διός*

The limits of dawn and evening are the Bear and, opposite the Bear, the guardian of bright Zeus.

More astronomy, and as I understand it, he is accurate in his assessment, with Charles H. Kahn informing, in his 1981 book *Heraclitus*, that the Bear must be Ursa Major, otherwise known as the ‘Big Dipper’, and that opposite it would be the star Arcturus, otherwise known as the ‘Bear Watcher’, with its dawn and evening risings corresponding to the spring and fall equinoxes, and that all of this was known to the Greeks of the Ionian period.

He goes into rather more detail, but that is, I expect, sufficient to further establish Heraclitus’ credentials as an astronomer.

B124

*σάρμα εἰκῆ̂ κεχυμένον ὁ κάλλιστος, φησὶν  
Ἡράκλειτος, (ὁ) κόσμος*

The most beautiful universe is (a) pouring out (of) sweepings at random.

Heraclitus waxing poetic? While it is certainly a lovely mental image, it is also yet another expression of Heraclitus rejecting the notion of pre–destiny, that the stars, or any other omens predict or define man’s destiny which, as he firmly asserted, rested with his character alone.

Thus, to him, the most beautiful universe is one which heralds, or is the result of nothing but chance, and which’s hold on man is limited to the way it inspires the imagination, as it has here.

B126

*τὰ ψυχρὰ θέρεται, θερμὸν ψύχεται, ὑγρὸν  
ἀναίνεται, καρφαλέον νοτίζεται*

Cold things become warm, and what is warm cools; what is wet dries, and the parched is moistened.

Heraclitus the physicist? I am well out of my depth here, but as I understand it, he is expressing something resembling Entropy, or the Second Law of Thermodynamics, albeit in a limited capacity.

Still, it illustrates that Heraclitus had a very active mind, ‘inquiring into many things indeed’ in his wisdom. I would be very curious to learn who his teacher in these matters was, or whether he was wholly self-taught. The latter seems less likely, but if so would certainly further establish his intellect as being seminal, certainly on par with other great minds, if not quite managing to reach the pedestal upon which Michelangelo stands alone, unchallenged in this author’s opinion.

Your mileage, of course and as always, may vary on this topic, as with any other.

B129

*Πυθαγόρης Μνησάρχου ιστορίην ἤσκησεν ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα πάντων καὶ ἐκλεξάμενος ταύτας τὰς συγγραφὰς ἐποίησατο ἑαυτοῦ σοφίην, πολυμαθίην, κακοτεχνίην*

Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, pursued inquiry further than all other men and, choosing what he liked from these compositions, claimed for himself a wisdom of his own: much learning, a bad craft.

Once again, Heraclitus refers to Pythagoras when making an example of too much knowledge not resulting in any appreciable wisdom.

In referring to the latter's sizeable body of learning as a 'bad craft' he is of course subtly, or not so much so, relegating the mathematician to the role of tradesman, and so beneath the ranks of those who pursue and, in particular, attain wisdom, and with it an understanding of knowledge's place.

While a more gracious writer might do so and still find praise for the subject of such an observation, Heraclitus has

never been accused of possessing a surfeit of any of the social graces.

Indeed, it seems more than likely he resented Pythagoras', as far as I have been able to determine, considerably greater fame and respect accorded him during Heraclitus' lifetime. To someone so utterly convinced of the importance, and underlying truth of their ways of reasoning, and likely possessed of a not inconsiderable ego, this must have rubbed on Heraclitus' last nerve, hence his rather strident tone throughout his repeated swipes at his apparent rival, at least for public attention and admiration.

Which seems to me to be an appropriate note on which to end the chapter on knowledge.



12

## EVERYTHING FLOWS

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*I believe, with all due respect to those who have studied and focused their attentions here, that there has been an undue weight placed upon the importance of this theory of flow.*

---

πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει

Everything changes and nothing stands still.

Quoted by Plato, in *Cratylus* 402a, this notion has, according to Wikiquote, a number of alternate translations, which I shall list, as none of them are represented in the *Fragments*, instead being attributed to Heraclitus by someone who may well have read his book before it was damaged, or who might otherwise be repeating words attributed to Heraclitus, as follows:

Everything flows and nothing stays.

Everything flows and nothing abides.

Everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.

Everything flows; nothing remains.

All is flux, nothing is stationary.

All is flux, nothing stays still.

All flows, nothing stays.

Examining each of these interpretations, it quickly becomes apparent that they carry the same seed of meaning, couched in metaphor. In some instances, the choice of wording favours flux, one involves giving away, and the rest use the term flows.

‘Everything flows’ has become one of the main elements of the study of Heraclitus. Indeed it is one of the first notions most biographies of the Weeping Sage address, as far as I have been able to discover, and while not without merit, as change is certainly central to Heraclitus’ philosophy, from his references to tension, or the ‘unity of opposites’, to his thoughts concerning the three stages of man, to his speculations about fire, as metaphor for divine inspiration among other notions, the only constants to Heraclitus are in his moral stances, and in his insistence that there are underlying truth(s) which govern all things, and which few men recognize.

Then, of course, perhaps most famously and eloquently presented is his metaphor for experience, and how it changes us, when he states that one cannot step twice into the same river.

I believe, with all due respect to those who have studied and focused their attentions here, that there has been an undue weight placed upon the importance of this theory of flow. That, in essence, those who find themselves devoting

an inordinate amount of attention to those two quotes are, perhaps, distracted by the fact that they both invoke water in some way.

As I hope to be demonstrating in this book, Heraclitus was very fond of metaphor, and that in fact nearly all of his surviving teachings, with the partial exception of his words regarding morals and ethics, where he is noticeably plainer and more approachable as the subject matter demands, just about all of his deeper teachings are expressed through a variety of metaphors.

That two of them should involve the image of a river flowing, or whatever mental image ‘flow’ as representing change may evoke, is likely not by accident, but I do believe that his readers are ill-served by concentrating overmuch on just these two of his passages, and attempting to in doing so find some greater, universal meaning in them than they merit, when placed against the full remaining body of his work.

Other than B12, of course, where he offers us the river metaphor, and the possible alternate translations of Plato’s

quoting him listed above, Heraclitus makes no verified mention of flow in any other part of his surviving works.

I would therefore suggest that the notion be let go as being a focus for anything but his entry test, B12, the river metaphor.

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*Of course, that I had already reached the same conclusion as Heraclitus, where what is now labelled Cognitive Dissonance is concerned no doubt gave me a significant head start Once I'd checked and re-checked his other teachings, looking always to discredit myself and cast doubt on my own observations.*

---

I strongly suspect that, having accrued a certain weight by being part of the established scholarly canon where Heraclitus is concerned, that those who formally study him are ill-served by it, distracting as it does from alternate interpretations.

Coming to Heraclitus as I did, a blank slate with sufficient command of Greek mythology and legends, as well as having devoured The Odyssey and The Iliad,

whatever Heraclitus might say, I feel that I have been better served acting as I have, which is to say reading his (translated) words first, and listening to what they might have to tell me, jotting that down, and only then combing through the Fragments for common themes, before venturing to learn more about the man and his life.

Of course, that I had already reached the same conclusion as Heraclitus, at least where what is now labelled as Cognitive Dissonance is concerned, no doubt gave me a significant head start. Once I'd checked and re-checked his other teachings, looking always to discredit myself and cast doubt on my own observations.

Only once the miserable old Greek remained stubbornly decipherable to me, that his words formed coherent narratives on a variety of identifiable topics, was I prepared, and reluctantly so, to accept that I might be onto something here, and if so, that I had a responsibility to try and convey his messages to a wider audience, among whom would hopefully be found minds greater than mine, and voices

more eloquent, to take these few conclusions and make of them what they might.

But had I first read what is held to be central to his philosophy, both in the notion of ‘everything flows’ and in the idea that he was in any way affiliated with the Stoics and later Christian efforts to co-opt him, when in fact his musings on the topic of the divine were of a much more personal, yet universal nature, as expressed by his theory of the three stages of being, then I am confident that, my inquiries being so influenced, I would likely never have succeeded, insofar as it remains the reader’s right to judge my efforts, in parsing him nearly as easily.

Rather than attempting to fit his words into pre-conceived categories, I let them inform me, with frequent pauses to research a place or name as yet unknown to me, and then went about looking for common themes, and how they might themselves find a larger, common base.

In short, I am relieved to have avoided that particular intellectual Chinese finger puzzle, and encourage those

who might undertake the study of Heraclitus of Ephesus to do the same.

In fact, I recognize and acknowledge that while I am extremely confident in the dialogues I present here, in my overall understanding of the man and his teachings, and of the value they represent to anyone for whom the study or practice of any of the subjects he touches upon, particularly the importance of understanding and the role of, and limitations inherent in knowledge and what can be known, that I too may colour some other minds' subsequent questing.

All I can offer in my own defence is that I am, as mentioned, confident that I am delivering much more accurate interpretations of his words than have come before me, and that there is real value in this, and that I further encourage the reader not only to consider my interpretations against the possibility that they may prove accurate, but equally to look for error, inconsistency, any sign of ignorance or failure on my part to reason, to learn,

and most importantly to understand the subject and his teachings.

I am in no way attached to always, or even often being ‘right’, and if I can be indulged in expressing my hopes for this, my own book, they would be that it be widely read, and translated, to serve as grist for the mill and that, ultimately, someone or someones else might then in turn publish an even more accurate, more eloquent, and more convincing volume, and that from there the cycle might begin anew, with each successive generation of thinkers offering ever increasingly sublime lessons for their readers’ benefit.

I assure you, I will be paying close attention, reading avidly, and perhaps offering my own humble opinions if asked.

I hope the reader will forgive me these digressions, however much I might feel that they relate to the fallacy of ‘everything flows’. Writing Heraclitus is not a joy for me. While I can easily imagine the excitement, even accomplishment that a scholar might well feel should they

find themselves in my shoes, my own experience is not a positive one.

For one, I've come to resent Heraclitus, in large part for his hard life and obvious difficulty being read and recognized. To say that this is not a foreign notion to me would be understatement. But coupled with the sense of obligation I feel at facing the possibility, however ridiculous to me, that many more years might pass before someone published their own comprehensive take on him, I consider this an obligation, not an opportunity.

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*In short, I am relieved to have avoided that particular intellectual Chinese finger puzzle, and encourage those who might undertake the study of Heraclitus of Ephesus to do the same.*

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Indeed, given my lack of credentials, I write expecting a harsh reception, and even that much only if I manage, lacking a publisher or resources with which to promote this book, to be read at all. In truth, this is not an experience I recommend.



**13**

## **STRAY NOTIONS**

The following Fragments represent what I refer to as ‘stray notions’, in that while clear enough in their meaning, they don’t easily fit any of Heraclitus’ themes and teachings as I have identified them.

As such, I have collected them here for the reader’s perusal, and perhaps they will find additional meaning, or context, where I have failed to do so.

In any event, here are the Fragments in question, coupled as always with my explanations of their meaning and, perhaps, their intent.

B9

*έτέρα γὰρ ἵππου ἡδονή καὶ κυνὸς καὶ ἀνθρώπου,  
ὄνους σύρματ' ἀν ἐλέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ χρυσόν· ἥδιον γὰρ  
χρυσοῦ τροπή ὄνοις*

For a horse, a dog and a human being have different pleasures; asses prefer straw to gold, since asses find food sweeter than gold.

A comment on what attracts and motivates people, in comparison to animals, each according to their nature.

That he suggests that humans find gold sweeter than food may be interpreted as another expression of his disdain for mankind's avarice, while making this observation as part of his reflecting on human vs. animal nature.

B13

*ῥες βορβόρω ἡδονται μᾶλλον ἢ καθαρῷ ὕδατι*  
Pigs delight in the mire more than in clean water.

Yet another comment on animal nature. If by this observation he is implying anything about man and his habits, it is not evident here, as an isolated quote.

B16

*τὸ μὴ δύνόν ποτε πῶς ἄν τις λάθοι;*

How can one hide from that which never sets?

I initially considered placing this in the chapter on Morality and Ethics, but it is not clear to me what he is referring to as ‘never setting’. It is obviously not the sun, and my best take on it is to infer that he may be referring to one’s conscience, or self-awareness.

B22

*χρυσὸν γὰρ οἱ διζήμενοι γῆν πολλὴν ὀρύσσουσι καὶ εὐρίσκουσιν ὀλίγον*

Those who seek for gold dig up much earth and find a little.

A commentary on those who value wealth above all. That men who do so must labour excessively for relatively small reward is, as he seems to suggest, a wasteful pursuit, in comparison to the quest for understanding and, ultimately,

wisdom, and the greater, if less tangible, rewards to be found therein.

B37

*Sues caeno cohortales aves pulvere vel cinere lavari.*

Swine wash in the mire, and barnyard fowls in dust.

Noting the lack of the original Greek text, it is nevertheless another typical Heraclitean observation of animal behaviour.

That I have become accustomed to searching for metaphor in his words leads me to speculate as to whether there is some lesson intended for, and reflecting on man's nature and behaviour in these past few Fragments leads me to suggest that there may be something of that ilk here, perhaps lost in the surrounding text.

B52

*Time is a child at play, moving pieces in a board game; the kingly power is a child's.*

Again lacking the original Greek, but the lesson is clear enough.

To children, time is of no concern, they exist in the now, and their imagination at play is unfettered by adult concerns.

Kings, by virtue of their position, share this luxury, unburdened by most adult concerns, and they move their human pieces as they will, in an adult version of children's play.

B75

*τοὺς καθεύδοντας ἐργάτας εἶναι καὶ συνεργοὺς τῶν  
ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ γινομένων*

Those who are asleep are fellow-workers in what goes on in the world.

I am taking as given, possibly unwisely so, that Heraclitus refers to those who are literally asleep, and to my mind, the obvious connection being that while sleeping, they dream.

And that in dreaming, he believed, they made a mark on the world, whether he meant in some mystical sense, or by acting upon those dreams once they wake.

While the latter is certainly the more logical, defensible take, I have a sneaking suspicion that he meant the former, as it reminds me of the tone he takes when discussing fire and water, which is Heraclitus at his most challenging, at least to my mind. If I'm lucky, I'll hear from one or more readers who have totally different, compelling dialogues to offer where mystic wizard Heraclitus is concerned.

B82

*πιθήκων ὁ κάλλιστος αἰσχρὸς ἀνθρώπων γένει  
συβάλλειν*

The most handsome of apes is ugly in comparison with a human.

Yet another venture into the natural world, through man's eyes.

Beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder.

B96

*νέκυες γὰρ κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι*

Corpses are more fit to be cast out than dung.

Corpses do nothing but decompose, their animating spark having fled, though family and friends no doubt retain an attachment to what it once represented while dung, though dirty and smelly, has use as fuel when dried.

A lesson, perhaps, on recognizing value where not immediately apparent.

B97

*κύνες γὰρ καταβαῦζουσιν ὧν ἂν μὴ γινώσκωσι*

Dogs bark at every one they do not recognize.

Heraclitus again visiting the natural world to make an observation and this one, I am confident, is intended as a lesson regarding those men who lack understanding, and so react without reasoning to that which they don't understand.

**14****THAT WHICH ELUDES ME**

---

*I would prefer to admit my ignorance in the cases of the Fragments which follow, than force an explanation and, in so doing, render myself susceptible to being exposed as a fool, or worse, a fraud.*

---

I freely admit that the following fragments' meanings escape me, having successfully fended off every reasonable

effort on my part at coaxing from them some hint as to their intended lessons. Whether this is due to some failing on my part, the incomplete and out-of-context nature of the entries in question, or some combination of both, in this at least Heraclitus will have to remain *nimis obscurē* – too obscure.

In many of these Fragments' cases, I felt tantalizingly close to reaching some insight, lacking just a hint of context, or a few more words' worth of content, but I have striven to exercise self-discipline in my efforts to parse Heraclitus' words. and that in these instances, any expressed meaning on my part would be reaching, forcing the passage to fit what had already emerged as a coherent, compelling dialogue, and that forcing it would be anathema to my stated aim of providing an explanation that matches what I know and understand of that culture and period, of metaphor, and of the ideas Heraclitus hold in common, being how and why I was able to effortlessly parse the first of his words presented to me, before learning that they were in any way obscure.

I would prefer to admit my ignorance in the cases of the Fragments which follow, than to try to force an explanation and, in so doing, render myself susceptible to being exposed as a fool, or worse, a fraud.

What I can say with some confidence is that, on their own, none of these Fragments appear to me to be introducing, or addressing any truly foreign concepts, though of course given the incomplete nature of the source material, it is entirely possible that they do so, in making reference to material since lost to us.

Whatever the truth of the matter, my efforts to parse Heraclitus' words end here. I will, after digressing to examine Socrates and his connection to Heraclitus, offer my conclusions before once again digressing, this time in a flight of fancy reflecting on that point in history where these two seminal minds, both of whom hold considerable meaning for me, coincide.

But my work as an interpreter, line by line, notion by notion, has run its course.

B5

καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλως αἵματι μαινόμενοι, ὁκοῖον εἴ  
 τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῶ ἀπονίζοιτο • μαίνεσθαι δ' ἂν  
 δοκέοι εἴ τις μιν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιθράσαιτο οὕτω  
 ποιέοντα. καὶ τοῖς ἀγάμμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὗχονται,  
 ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο, οὐ τι  
 γινώσκων θεοὺς οὐδ' ἥρωας οἵτινές εἰσι

they are cleansed, and they are cleansed, and they are  
 cleansed, and they are cleansed, and they are cleansed of them,  
 and these are the scriptures which are given to them, even as  
 the gods of God, which are their own

However, if I were to comment on the preceding  
 translation, then I would immediately be suspicious, as the  
 repetitive language has, to me, more the feel of a Christian  
 sermon than anything else, and I might therefore be moved  
 to question its authenticity.

But, as noted, I do not in fact have any insight here, I was  
 merely, once again, presuming on the reader's goodwill to  
 indulge one of my periodic flights of fancy.

B68

*καὶ διὰ τοῦτο εἰκότως αὐτὰ ἄκεα Ἡράκλειτος  
προσεῖπεν ὡς ἐξακεσόμενα τὰ δεινὰ καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς  
ἐξάντεις ἀπεργαζόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ γενέσει συμφορῶν*

and in fact such an encroachment came as exorbitants and  
the psychic exercists working in the form of conspiracy

This otherwise incomprehensible to me Fragment is  
nonetheless tantalizing me with its references to the  
supernatural and conspiracies.

B69

*θυσιῶν τοίνυν τίθημι διττὰ εἶδη· τὰ μὲν τῶν  
ἀποκεκαθαρμένων παντάπασι ἀνθρώπων, οἷα ἐφ'  
ἐνὸς ἄν ποτε γένοιτο σπανίως*

sacrifices are the two-fold of the unclean all-human beings,  
whether by the time of rare occurrence

B74

*οὐ δεῖ ὥσπερ καθεύδοντας ποιεῖν καὶ λέγειν• καὶ  
γὰρ καὶ τότε δοκοῦμεν ποεῖν καὶ λέγειν*

he shall give the name of all that he speaks; and then we  
gathered and said

B77

ὄθεν καὶ Ἡράκλειτον ψυχῆσι φάναι τέρψιν ἢ  
θάνατον ὑγρῆσι γενέσθαι. τέρψιν δὲ εἶναι αὐταῖς τὴν  
εἰς γένεσιν πτώσιν. ἀλλαχοῦ δὲ φάναι ζῆν ἡμᾶς τὸν  
ἐκείνων θάνατον καὶ ζῆν ἐκείνας τὸν ἡμέτερον  
θάνατον

and then he shuts the soul to the end of his life. it is the end  
of the day. another person shall be the victim of those deaths  
and of the latter's death

B81

... κοπίδων ἐστὶν ἀρχηγός

κοπίδας τὰς λόγων τέχνας ἔλεγον ἄλλοι τε καὶ ὁ  
Τίμαιος οὕτως γράφων• ὥστε καὶ φαίνεσθαι μὴ τὸν  
Πυθαγόραν εὐρετὴν ὄντα τῶν ἀληθινῶν κοπίδων μηδὲ  
τὸν ὑφ' Ἡρακλείτου κατηγορούμενον, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν τὸν  
Ἡράκλειτον εἶναι τὸν ἀλαζονευόμενον

... fourteen chief priests

of the work of art, he said, and the Timaeus of all graveyards,  
and they appear to the Pythagoreans who are not the true ones  
of the rape of the accused, but these are the soldiers

Note, the translation of this fragment was the result of the author's resorting to Google Translate, and should not reflect on Randy Hoyt in any way.

B76

*πυρὸς θάνατος ἀέρι γένεσις, καὶ ἀέρος θάνατος  
ὔδατι γένεσις*

The death of fire is the birth of air, and the death of air is the birth of water.

Of all the Fragments which elude me, I fought hardest to gain some insight as to this one, appearing as it does to be central to Heraclitus' beliefs concerning the elements, either as empirical observations, or expressions of his metaphysical beliefs.

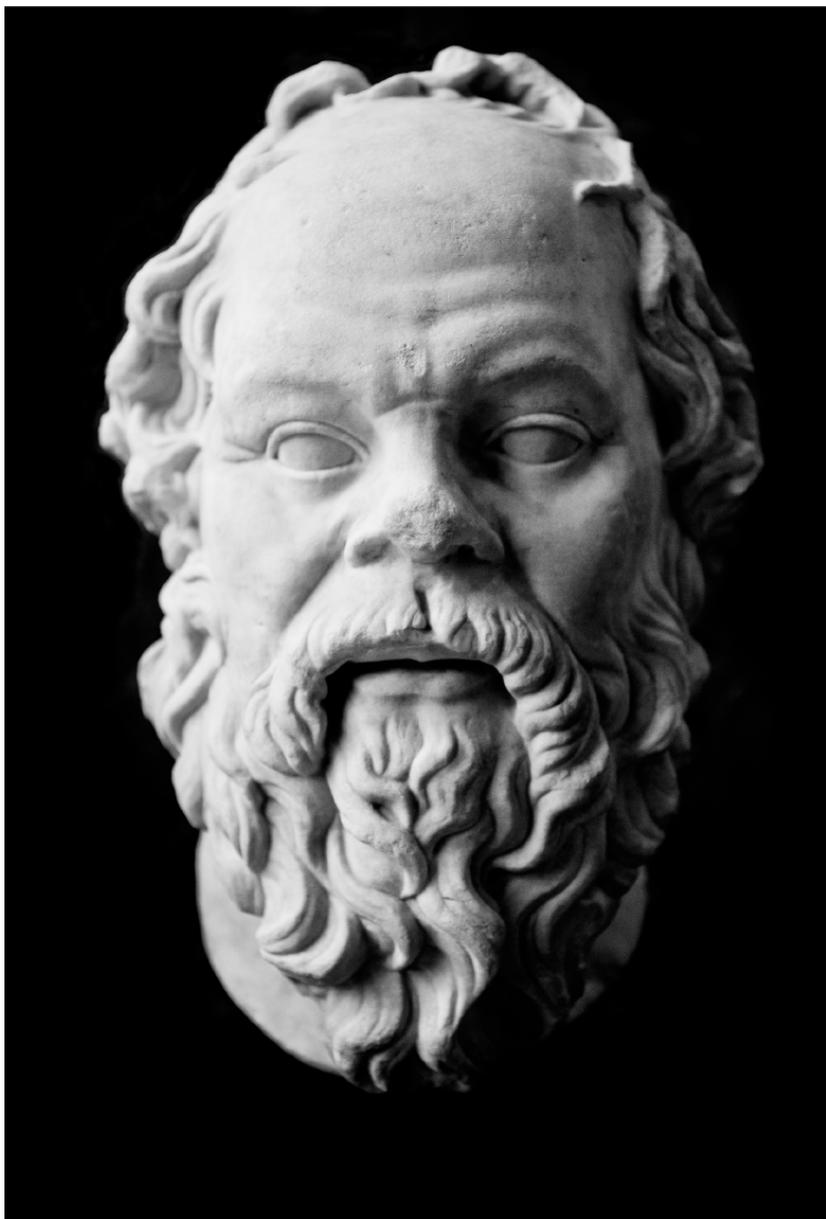
Alas, it proved tantalizingly just out of my reach. Perhaps a reader might find meaning where I have failed to do so.

B122

*ἀγχιβασίην*

... stepping near

If anyone can extract anything from those two words,  
more power to them.



## 15

**SOCRATES, SOME PLATO**

*"The concepts I understand are great, but I believe that the concepts I can't understand are great too. However, the reader needs to be an excellent swimmer like those from Dilos, so as not to be drown from his book."*

~Socrates, commenting on On Nature, excerpted from Section 3: Gods and Oracles of Project Gutenberg's Apology, Crito and Phaedo of Socrates, by Plato

Here we have Socrates making explicit reference to Heraclitus' book, On Nature, and embracing its principal lessons, while confessing that some of the Weeping Sage's concepts escaped him.

As to the latter, he doesn't say which notions he finds challenging, but he clearly grasped the most important aspects of Heraclitus' teachings, being the importance of understanding and the limits and perils inherent in knowing.

The link between these two great minds plays out throughout Socrates' life in both the manner in which he emphasizes that he 'knows nothing', which is of course not entirely true, as he certainly had a solid grasp on numbers, etc., but I'm not splitting hairs, and his oft-stated conviction that he knows nothing being the core of his own philosophy, as well as that of his teaching method.

And like Heraclitus, Socrates didn't just plainly state the importance and relevance of understanding when he taught, but rather prodded and led his students towards this realization, but he allowed, and required them to make that final leap on their own, apparently sharing his predecessor's conviction that this realization must be earned, not simply passed along.

How much more engaging is his already riveting *Apology* when one takes his repeated statements that he doesn't know what his neighbours various peccadilloes were, then silently appends 'but I understand them' to each exchange?

*"I do believe that there are gods, and in a far higher sense than that in which any of my accusers believe in them."*

~Socrates, Apology

And here we have Socrates making clear that his understanding of what defines a god differs from those around him. When coupled with his expressed belief in his 'Daimon', widely believed to imply divine inspiration or guidance, it seems reasonable to me to speculate that he is in fact echoing Heraclitus' belief that godhood is not supernatural in nature, but rather the third and final stage of humanity's growth, beginning with childhood, progressing through adulthood and, for those who achieve wisdom, with it ultimately godhood?

The similarities between these two brilliant minds are striking, if not completely unlikely given their connection through Heraclitus' book, and shared passion for understanding, and efforts to teach those who would attend them, without handing to them what must instead be earned if it is to provide its fullest value.

I also present for the reader's consideration this common, harmonious ground shared between them as further evidence, if any more is needful, that the insights I am offering into the Weeping Sage's too long obscure teachings, methods and intentions are on, or very, very close to the mark.

That Plato twice failed to grasp what he was apparently unable, with his method of drilling down, which is a superb tool for knowledge, but less ideal where understanding is the key, is unfortunate. I am uncertain whether he is quoted as to having read Heraclitus, but I have seen words relating to him attributed to Plato, though I can't attest to their legitimacy, as there are certain phrases mistakenly credited Heraclitus, and others without sources I could easily check, but the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy cites Heraclitus as a significant influence on Plato, and he was alive and active for much of his life before *On Nature* was damaged, so it seems highly likely that he read it, and that he failed to intuit the required leap from metaphor to underlying lessons, etc.

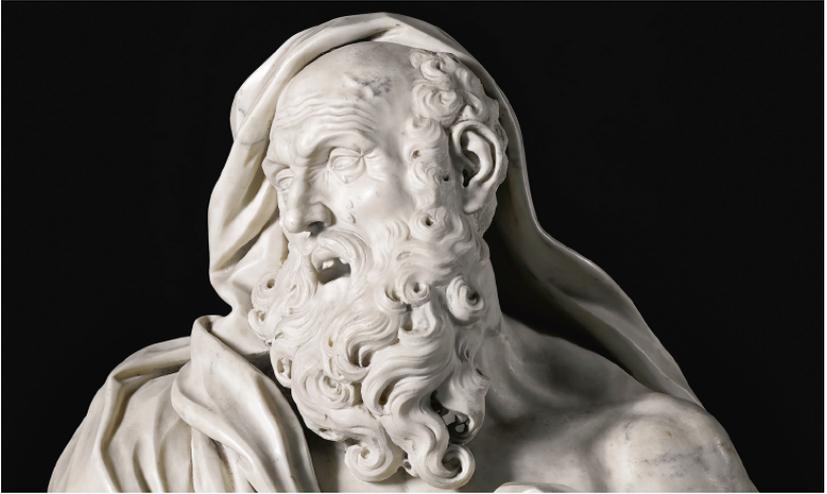
And of course, as a student of Socrates, he would be doubly exposed to these notions, both as Socrates may well have spoken of his own influencer, Heraclitus, and that he was of course exposed to Socrates' own way of teaching, with the same emphasis on understanding and, in his case, catching what was significantly left unsaid when Socrates, as he was notably wont to do, claimed to know nothing.

'I don't know, but I understand'

Which, and now I am purely indulging my over-active imagination, might suggest that Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave was, in some way, that brilliant man's expressing the sense that there was something that just eluded him, that he couldn't grasp, but for slight glimpses perhaps, and this would be poignantly ironic if true, then this, his own best-known foray into the realm of allegory to express his sense of failing to apprehend.

That little fiction, which is what it is in all likelihood of course, makes the otherwise to me somewhat off-putting Plato a far more sympathetic figure. I can certainly relate to being aware of my own many failures, over the years, to

understand what is easily, even instinctively grasped by most everyone around me. It can be a lonely, bewildering experience, and not one I can in good conscience recommend.

**16**

## IN CONCLUSION

Heraclitus of Ephesus was a seminal thinker who lived at the beginning of, and perhaps defined the period during which philosophers, and philosophy itself reached its apex in the ancient world, commonly referred to as the Socratic period, insofar as other Greeks are characterized as being Pre-Socratic. That Heraclitus was not recognized as being the pivotal thinker he assuredly was while simultaneously being universally accepted as having coined the terms those who followed would adopt is, I think unquestionably, due to

his being both difficult to penetrate, due in part to his fondness for metaphor and his apparent insistence that certain important truths cannot be explicitly taught, but rather that the would-be student must himself make a leap of reason to grasp what his teacher, and this quality is echoed in one of Heraclitus' followers, Socrates', own methods as imparting.

Given that his work, *On Nature*, was badly damaged in antiquity, we are now, and have been for millennia, left only with the 119 Fragments, of more or less coherent content, from which to study him, and it appears, as is commonly accepted even by those who have come before me in their efforts to understand the so-called Weeping Sage, that little progress had been made, in part, I suspect, because of certain themes that have accrued to the study of Heraclitus and, in so colouring the would-be scholar's efforts to grasp him, they have perhaps been done a disservice by diverting the attention of those who would know him from the paths they might have otherwise explored, as have I, or otherwise

colouring their perceptions with these preconceived notions.

Coming to Heraclitus as a blank slate, as I did, was, I have little doubt, coupled with my having reached certain conclusions in common with the old Greek, proved to be the difference.

If the reader has found any notions worth considering, or further perusal, then my efforts as an author will have borne the desired fruit.

I don't claim to be the last word where Heraclitus is concerned. Quite to the contrary, I hope only to spark discussions, by minds greater than mine and voices more eloquent whose reach, I hope infinitely greater than mine, might help spread awareness of the first, most seminal of the 'Pre-Heraclitic' school of philosophy, and that his teachings, many of which are echoed by no less a figure than Socrates, who admitted to studying *On Nature*, might gain traction in such fields as differing methods of teaching, and learning, of alternatives to the existing education system.

Leading to, I fervently hope, a different understanding of knowledge, its place, its uses and its inherent limitations, and by extension, new looks at the nature of prejudice and the role of understanding in bridging these topics and presenting itself as the tool required where some of these topics are concerned.

That this volume has been penned by one who freely admits, even embraces his lack of what might be termed conventional schooling might, I hope, should readers find anything of worth in these pages, signify that different ways of learning, and different efforts at understanding have a place in our society, and that voices which dare to differ might be worth, at the very least, a moment's attention on the part of more conventional thinkers and institutions.



17

## HERACLITUS AND MICHELANGELO

This chapter contributes no additional insight into the words or meaning of the Weeping Sage, but it does nicely, I think, both bring my efforts to conclusion while also serving as a form of foreshadowing, insofar as my subsequent writing projects are concerned.

I came to Michelangelo much as I did Heraclitus, with no preconceived notions about the artist or his thoughts.

Indeed, my aversion to the Vatican is such that I'd pretty much dismissed anyone, or anything most commonly associated with it. In fact, when I finally did begin looking into the singular genius that is Il Divino I did so out of a certain malicious sort of curiosity, having acquired the impression that he had, repeatedly in fact, essentially flipped off the Vatican, and specifically the Popes of his time and lived, at a time when people were being arrested, excommunicated, tortured and even killed for so much as daring to suggest that the Pope, and by extension anyone carrying out his decrees, was in any way fallible or subject to criticism.

While the rest of that story belongs to another book, tentatively titled *Il Divino*, reading about Michelangelo, specifically his being commissioned, if not outright press-ganged into painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel brought to my attention this story of how his work so inspired a fellow artist that he was moved to express his utter admiration for Michelangelo, and the to me uncanny manner in which he went about it.

The story begins with the possibly apocryphal tale of young Raphael, already an accomplished painter in his own right, being given a tour of the unfinished frescoes being painted by Michelangelo, under conditions of absolute secrecy, on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel by Raphael's patron, Bramante.



As the story has it, young Raphael was so utterly awed by the transcendent brilliance displayed by Michelangelo's efforts, which even in their incomplete condition conveyed that artist's famous and singular *terribilità* that, artistic rivalry be damned, and there is little doubt that there existed tension between them, if for no other reason than Michelangelo's famously touchy temperament, Raphael decided to honour him by incorporating Michelangelo's likeness into his own project, the nature of which, and the

manner in which he did so combining to deliver, at least to me, invested as I was, and remain, an uncanny and inspiring revelation.

Raphael's current project was another painting for the Vatican, I believe to decorate the Pope's own apartments.

He chose as his subject matter the Ancient Greek philosophers, calling his painting the 'School of Athens' and, in depicting the personalities thus evoked, he is said to have followed a practice fairly common at the time and used the likenesses of his patrons, mentors and peers to represent assorted Ancient Greek thinkers. That in so doing he might be making comments as to these worthies' natures or qualities, or flattered them by associating them with such august company is not a knock on the painter. It was a common enough practice, one that none other than Michelangelo himself, albeit with decidedly different intentions, but that is a topic to be explored in another book

At any rate, Raphael had indeed painted a collection of famous thinkers of antiquity, and arranged them carefully throughout the setting, which took the form of a his

envisioning Plato's school where Greece's philosophers might gather and learn, and depicted not only himself among them, but also none other than Leonardo da Vinci in the role of Plato.

If Raphael's own masterpiece was well underway, even nearing completion, having been painted in 1509–1510, while Michelangelo accomplished his frescoed ceiling between 1508–1512, it seems plausible that while an educated Renaissance man might well be aware of the so-called Weeping Sage, the 'obscure' Heraclitus, even of his having coined the term *λόγος*, the subsequent damage to his writings, compounded by what, I quietly suspect, was Plato's incomplete understanding of either his own reading from what may not have been a complete manuscript, or his, having apparently having witnessed the trial of Socrates, and thereby having been exposed to the same teachings and methodology, albeit presented differently as required by the medium in which they were delivered, Heraclitus in writing, Socrates with the spoken word, this could well have resulted in Heraclitus, misunderstood as he was, having

been left off the initial design, thereby providing a suitably lofty role for Raphael to assign Michelangelo, who he added to his painting in a prominent position in the foreground, by necessity if for no other reason. Whatever his intentions in so doing, Raphael did himself great credit as an artist.

I relate this historical accident not because it adds to our understanding of the Weeping Sage, but because tripping over this tidbit while researching Michelangelo tickled me, as *Il Divino* is another subject of immense fascination to me, and will be the focus of a future book, should my ongoing research into his words and artistic accomplishments continue to bear fruit.

It also seems to me to be a gentle way to bring this narrative to a close. I hope that the reader has found value in the ideas and explanations I have presented and that, ultimately, this book might serve to spark further discussion of Heraclitus, Socrates, the nature of and perils associated with knowledge, and the importance of understanding to the rational mind.

**18****AFTERWARDS**

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*This book was written in the memory of Steve Jobs, whose words inspired me, and whose technology made it possible for me to build my own mind, my own ethics and values, my own ways of knowing, and understanding, and to see the world through the eyes of others generous enough to share their views.*

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I was of course inspired by a great many sources, minds greater than my own and voices far more eloquent, and so

I'd like to take advantage of the opportunity to both acknowledge them and pass their words along, in the hope that others will find their own inspiration in them, and that it might fuel their own efforts when they are most in need of a little nudge. May you all find accomplishment at whatever fuels your passions, and may your road to success or self-realization be a gentle one.

*“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.”*

~ Michelangelo

*“Good artists copy, great artists steal.”*

~ Pablo Picasso

*“You have to learn the rules of the game. And then you have to play better than anyone else.”*

~ Albert Einstein

*“When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down ‘happy’. They told me I didn’t understand the assignment, and I told them they didn’t understand life.”*

~ John Lennon

*“To move the world we must move ourselves.”*

~ Socrates

*“Talent hits a target no one else can hit, but genius hits a target no one else can see.”*

~ Schopenhauer

*“When governments fear the people, there is liberty. When the people fear the government, there is tyranny.”*

~ Thomas Jefferson

*“Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”*

~ Rob Siltanen, often mis-attributed to Steve Jobs

Having offered the reader such examples of truly great, inspiring minds as seem appropriate to me, I now reprint one of Steve Jobs' amazing lessons, one which I somehow missed until after his passing, and which inspired me to write this book.



*One of our issues as a society going forward is to teach kids to express themselves in the medium of their generation. For the better part of the past century, the medium was the printed page, whether it was a newspaper or a novel. People not only consumed; they authored. When people read novels, they wrote letters. The medium of our times is video and photography, but most of us are still consumers as opposed to being authors. We see things changing. We are doing more and more with movies and DVDs.*

*The drive over the next 20 years is to integrate these multimedia tools to the point where people become authors in the medium of their day. We think there is tremendous power in this. You should see the movies that kids and teachers are making now. They make movies to sell an idea and to lead a team. I can show you a movie made by a sixth-grade teacher with her kids about learning the principles of geometry in a way that you will never forget. Or one by a high-school junior who felt passionately about women workers in sweatshops.*

*When students are creating themselves, learning is taking place. And teachers will be at the epicenter of this. Anyone who believes differently has never had a good teacher.*

*I would trade all of my technology for an afternoon with Socrates.*

~Steve Jobs (1955–2011)

I am baffled that I completely missed this famous Steve Jobs quote when it was first published, being as I am a longtime follower of Apple, dedicated Macintosh user, and generally Jobs-oriented in my awareness.

Not that I much liked the man, though I never met him in person, but of course I admired his genius, and his technology changed my life in so many ways, including expanding the world from which I could draw upon in building my own mind, which in turn eventually led to my being able to write and self-publish this book.

I'd have loved to have a traditional publisher pick it up, of course, but I am an unknown, lacking the sort of credentials publishers rely on in their quest to sell books.

I am, of course, entirely open to hearing from, any potential publisher or literary agent who might be reading this.

I first published *All Apologies*, of which this is essentially the revised edition, as an iBook, and a tragically flawed one at that, during perhaps the darkest period of my adult life.

In fact, I wrote and published it from my bed in a mental health ward.

His words inspired me, of course, but they also gave me comfort in these darker hours. Not the quote about Socrates, but his other, to me life–altering notions.

*"Insanely Great."*

*"Here's to the Crazy Ones."*

*"Think Different."*

*Even "Your Time Is Limited."*

In the end, with that last message, I was happy for him, sensing that he finally ‘got it’.

How much it saddens me, then, that our lives’ paths never crossed, particularly once I’d discovered Heraclitus, and by extension Socrates.

And so, I write the following knowing that Steve Jobs is gone, but that he remains alive in the hearts and minds of so many of the people whose lives he and his creations touched. And perhaps I also address this to those at Apple who follow him and, sometimes, too often really in my

estimation, have limited themselves and his legacy to merely producing more and shinier devices.

*"Here, Steve. This book, and the glimpse of more Socrates, or at least Socrates with additional context and insight, in return for your technology, as you expressed.*

*"I'm not asking you, or Apple for a thing, mind. I've already, over the last quarter-century, acquired and profited from all of your technology. It redefined what was possible for me, and allowed me to engage with the world in spite of my severe social retardation, and as a result to learn and grow as a person. You delivered your end of the bargain long ago. I'm just holding up mine, however late I am in doing so."*

I had hoped, when I first self-published All Apologies as an iBook without a single attempt at marketing it, or myself, to attract Apple's attention. In my mind, I could see Tim Cook, or better yet, Steve Wozniak being moved by both the truths contained in these pages, and by the love behind them.

Of course, I've grown a bit cynical in recent years where Apple is concerned, so I could also, in my wilder flights of fancy, imagine them making a mint by using my book to launch an ad campaign, taking advantage of one more link to their charismatic and deeply missed founder to sell more devices, media, what have you. I do have a vivid imagination, unfettered by any sense of entitlement.

But the truth is, I've never been able to attract their notice, in spite of my efforts to reach Woz (and I've been pretty creative) or writing Tim Cook directly, and so that book, and now this new effort as well will likely sit in the iBooks catalogue, under their noses, unread, the devotion it represents unappreciated. Which, if I'm honest, saddens me for them, more than it does me.

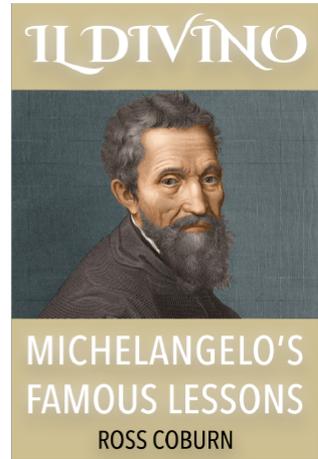
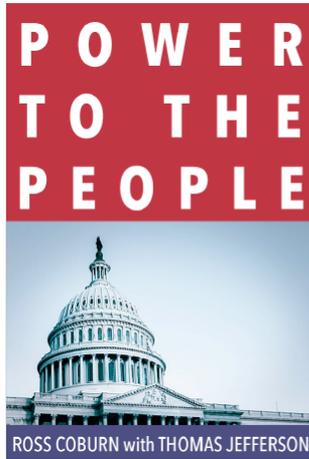
My efforts to contact the Jobs family have been similarly unsuccessful, and I prefer not to cross the line separating 'attempting to communicate' with 'stalking'.

Of course, this time around I'm going to publish it on Amazon, etc., as well, and hope to find my audience, maybe even earn a few pennies for my efforts. If nothing else, I'll

be needing to replace my writing tools before long, and I have at least a couple more books in me.

If you're reading these words, whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you may think of my efforts to both present an ancient mind long past due the full recognition he deserves and, admittedly, offer here and there a few insights into my own existence, stemming from my desire to connect with people who might be moved in turn to extend themselves...

Thank you so very much.



## 19

### IF YOU ENJOYED THIS BOOK

If you enjoyed reading Heraclitus – Nimis ObscurĒ, or if you found it in any way useful, above all else I would like to know.

If you have critiques to offer, or additional insights, I am eager to read them.

Whatever the case, please consider taking a few minutes to write a review, be it on the site you bought the book (Amazon, iBooks being the most likely) or using the contact form on my own site:

[Ross Coburn ✱ Incrociare](http://www.rosscoburn.me) or

<http://www.rosscoburn.me>.

To a small, self-published author such as myself, word of mouth is essential, particularly if I hope to have my future efforts published traditionally, and I confess I would very much enjoy the experience of being taken care of in that way by one of the publishing houses whose Lógos adorn the books in my library, and those lining the shelves of my favourite local bookstores.

I offered the first edition of this book free of charge for four years, just wanting it to reach an audience, albeit without any efforts to market it. Over that period it was downloaded some five-hundred times, but never once reviewed or commented upon anywhere I could find.

And so, clearly, money was no object then and the price of this revised edition remains, I think, fairly modest. If for any reason the reader might feel that it is worth more than the price they paid for it and might wish to make some form of contribution the first, most obvious way would be by gifting a copy of the book to friends, family or associates,

which would both earn me a few more pennies and, more importantly, help get it read.

Alternately, some of my favourite charities include:

[Autism Canada](#), another way of Thinking Different.

[Doctors Without Borders](#), who humble me by putting aside the material wealth they might so easily enjoy in favour of giving, and the real human riches that their efforts represent.

[Julian Lennon's White Feather Foundation](#). I have, of course, reached out to JL, as well as Sean and Yoko, and of course I failed to make a connection. I can hardly feel slighted, given the immense volume of correspondence they must receive, never mind my own frustrating inability to be seen, read, or glimpsed. Consider this my last effort, under whatever name a reader might contribute, to somehow touch their world.

[UNICEF](#), the first charity I became aware of, as well as the notion of giving to others less fortunate, when during each Hallowe'en's trick-or-treating I, and the other

children around me, would all wear our little UNICEF boxes and collect pennies from our neighbours.

And, finally, the [World Wildlife Fund](#). Yet another childhood passion I am thrilled to be able to promote, even in this small way.

Please feel free to contact me, through my website, on Facebook (RossCoburn, or my page Incrociare) or Twitter (@RossCoburn). I am always happy to engage with new people on just about any topic, and look forward to possibly hearing from you.

My next project is getting underway, and I expect to be looking for representation as well as, I can only hope, a publishing contract.

Yours sincerely, and with many thanks,

Ross Coburn

11/2017