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WEAVING THE FISH BASKET: HERACLITUS AND THE META-PHILOSOPHY OF OPPOSITION

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Abstract: Heraclitus, by means of gnomic utterances and enigmatic expositional strategies offers a unique rhetorical model of heuristic method. His approach to philosophy, therefore, is the first to be explicitly meta-philosophical. His refusal to separate his own ontological and epistemological investigations from questions concerning the proper means by which such contents can best be understood and expressed sets a precedent that finds important echoes in the history of our tradition. His view of the relation of the structures of reality to the structures of language, in which both are understood to be inherently paradoxical, requires procedures for understanding the world and talking about it that recognize and exploit the essentially riddle-like nature of both things and words. This paper examines several of the fragments that directly address these relations, and, in particular, the nature of riddles, in terms that stand as a singular articulation of order as deeply and paradoxically oppositional in nature. I argue that by paying attention to what Heraclitus *does* at least as much as to what he says, much still remains to be learned from this powerful and obscure thinker about possibilities for investigating and explicating the content matter of philosophy.

WEAVING THE FISH BASKET: HERACLITUS AND THE META-PHILOSOPHY OF OPPOSITION

> But one must not think ill of the paradox, for the paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow…. This, then, is the ultimate paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think.
> — Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*

There are philosophers who stand in opposition, meta-philosophically, to the general systematic tendency of philosophy, in that these philosophers suggest that the contents of philosophy are such as to require expositional strategies whose goal it is to *do* something *with* and *to* the reader rather than merely to *say* something. For thinkers such as these, including several writing at the beginning of philosophical inquiry in Greece, such as, famously, Plato, but also Parmenides and Zeno and Heraclitus, the contents of philosophy are *not* best approached by means of discursive propositions. These thinkers searched for and implemented strategies that explicitly addressed the meta-philosophical question of how philosophy must be expressed if it is to be successful at fostering understanding about the nature of things. Since that origin, however, philosophy has tended to be more conformist, albeit with notable exceptions. It is worth attending closely to these early explorations and choices in order to re-introduce fresh perspectives to our own inquiries.

Heraclitus, according to his own testimony, knew how to listen to the *Logos*, and in listening, produced a *logos* of his own that is one of the most remarkable in early Greek philosophy, particularly with respect to the concept of opposition.[1] His writing models what he appears to understand as both ontological and logical structure. For him, the world is a riddle, and he chose to write in riddles. His nickname, "the obscure" is from a later date, but Timon of Phlius called him "the riddler."[2] His mention of the Oracle at Delphi in Fragments 92 and 93 indicate his familiarity with an oracular style of writing and may be consciously imitating it. His

reputation among the ancient commentators is unlike that of any of his contemporaries. He is not infrequently chided for being misanthropic, evidence for which is mostly culled from his own writings. But he is at least as frequently characterized as an unusually and deeply puzzling author.

Plato and Aristotle never seem to have seriously engaged Heraclitus. There is an anecdote in Diogenes Laertius in which Socrates was given the treatise of Heraclitus by Euripedes and asked what he thought of it. His reply was supposed to have been: "The part I understand is excellent, and so too is, I dare say, the part I do not understand; but it needs a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it."[3] Theophrastus, Aristotle's student and successor, is the first to treat him in any sustained way, and he appears not to have had much of the text to work with and largely to have followed Aristotle's summary interpretation. He complained that Heraclitus' pronouncements were unfinished and inconsistent.[4] As Kirk, Raven and Schofield point out, part of Aristotle's complaint was that Heraclitus "did not use the categories of formal logic, but tended to describe the same thing (or roughly the same thing) now as a god, now as a form of matter, now as a rule of behavior or principle which was nevertheless a physical constituent of things."[5]

Diogenes Laertius records that some thought that Heraclitus made his work "deliberately obscure in order that none but adepts should approach it."[6] Clement of Alexandria relates a letter supposedly written by the king of Persia, Darius, to Heraclitus remarking the unusual nature of his work:

> You are the author of the of a treatise *On Nature* which is hard to understand and hard to interpret. In certain parts, if it be interpreted word for word, it seems to contain a power of speculation on the whole universe and all that goes on within it…; but for the most part judgment is suspended, so that even those who are the most conversant with literature are at a loss to know what is the right interpretation of your work.[7]

Diogenes tells us that Heraclitus is the subject of many epigrams such as the following:

> Do not be in too great a hurry to get to the end of Heraclitus the Ephesian's book: the path is hard to travel. Gloom is there and darkness devoid of light. But if an initiate be your guide, the path shines brighter than sunlight.[8]

There were many early commentators whose testimony is lost, but Diogenes records their names and remarks that they all seem to have had very different ideas about even what sort of treatise his work was, whether on nature or on politics or ethics, and which parts served as the main focus, which as illustrations.[9] This circumstance alone indicates the difficulty even those closest to his era had in recognizing and determining the nature of his expositional strategies.

Many more recent scholars have noted the central role gnomic utterance and riddles play in Heraclitus' thinking.[10] Such utterances serve as the primary means by which he conducts and articulates his inquiry. Kahn has noted that although Heraclitus adopts an oracular form, unlike oracles, which admit of only a single correct interpretation, Heraclitus' meaning is intentionally multi-layered and complex.[11] Hussey has noted four categories of utterance in Heraclitus (while admitting the difficulty of making clear distinctions between categories and examples): (a) the plain style in which he describes and denounces human lack of understanding, and in which the language is straightforward, ordinary and syntactically simple; (b) aphorisms in ordinary language, tersely phrased but immediately intelligible in ordinary terms; (c) 'parables' or images drawn from ordinary life, again economically phrased, in ordinary language, but with a significance not necessarily even partly obvious; and (d) a cryptic style in which deliberate formulations of important truths utilize unusual words and elaborate syntax, often intending several meanings, some of which, Hussey believes, may be concealed. He finds parallels for all these forms of expression in the language of prophets, seers and oracles, especially in Pindar and Aeschylus, connections that Kahn also finds to be particularly strong. I would argue that none of these categories may be applied straightforwardly to the majority of the fragments in which Heraclitus expresses or develops his central themes. Hölscher has argued that the fragments

which formulate doctrine are different from what he labels Heraclitus' "image statements," which he takes to be more on the order of examples than metaphors, in that they do not explain and they do not argue, but they, instead, seek paradox.[12] Yet, even in those fragments that Hölscher takes as formulating doctrine, he finds almost every sentence to be a gnomic utterance and the general thrust of the language to be towards gnomic utterance.

Heraclitus himself makes clear in the opening passage of his work that he is trying to do something at least difficult, if not even unprecedented:

> Although this *logos* holds forever, people always prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and once they have heard it. Although all things come to be in accordance with this *logos*, people are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and explaining how it is.[13]

The *logos* that Heraclitus relates, in words *and deeds*, is precisely an articulation, as he claims, of the way the cosmos is organized, by being an articulation of the *logos* that in fact organizes the cosmos. Many other fragments make it clear, as Sextus Empiricus noted, that Heraclitus proposed *logos*, not experience or sense perception, as the criterion for truth, for coming to understand the world and oneself.[14] It is important to note that Heraclitus claims that when one experiences his *logos*, one experiences more than words, one experiences *deeds*. He is explicitly claiming that his *logos* does something to and with those who read it. This assertion by itself, and there are other fragments which echo and support this claim, shows that Heraclitus felt that he had access to an important truth about the way the world is and works, and tried to communicate that truth to those who, with echoes of Nietzsche, have the ears to hear the particular way his *logos* illuminates the way things are.

Therefore, *solving* Heraclitus' riddles should not rank as a priority in analysis; and Heraclitus himself makes no attempt to explain or otherwise resolve his paradoxes and riddles.[15] Rather examining his riddles and the nature of riddling as he seems to view it promises to be

most helpful in seeking to understand the relation of his expositional strategies and the content matter which he engages – the ordered and ordering unity of oppositions which constitute the nature of reality and goes, for Heraclitus, by the name of *Logos*. In what follows, I will offer a close examination of a few of the fragments that deal most directly with riddles in order to flesh out the relation Heraclitus himself remarks between his thought and practice.

Heraclitus the Obscure

> I will speak in riddles, so as to be understood.
> — Sophocles

Kahn noted that "the paradoxical conception of the human condition as a state of deepest ignorance in the face of an immediately accessible truth serves to define the basic framework with which [Heraclitus'] specific doctrines must be understood."[16] One of the places where Heraclitus gave explicit expression to such a conception is in fragment B56: "People are deceived in the recognition of what is obvious...." Even were we prepared to grant, along with most of his ancient commentators, that Heraclitus held most others in low regard, we do not, in any fragment that speaks to the ability to understand, have a mere dismissal of the general potential to understand ourselves and our world more deeply. There are fragments, such as B116, where Heraclitus specifically accords to all the ability to think well and to know themselves, a supreme virtue in Greek tradition. A careful look at his fragments reveals that the failure on the part of most people to recognize the obvious is not from lack of ability, but due rather to some aspect of the nature of the obvious itself, or of the nature of recognition, or both. In the fragments dealing with understanding, we have carefully worded descriptions of the riddle-like state of things, and equally careful prescriptions for addressing the difficulties which stand in the way of understanding.

The whole of B56 offers such a lesson: "People are deceived in the recognition of what is obvious, in every way as was Homer, who was the wisest of all the Greeks. For he was deceived by boys killing lice, who said: "what we see and catch we leave behind; what we neither see nor catch, we carry away." Here we are told that people encounter appearance – that which is *phaneros*, what is open to sight, manifest, visible – but fail to recognize it, to know it for what it is, and they fail in a particular way: they fail "in every way", Heraclitus tells us, as does Homer in that they are somehow deceived by a riddle.

The riddle is instructive in this fragment, and not merely a bit of folksy entertainment drawn from the popular *Lives* of Homer in circulation at the time.[17] In it, as is common with riddles in general, Homer lacks a crucial piece of information, provided for us by Heraclitus, that will make sense of the boys' words. Homer encounters the boys coming back from fishing and asks after their catch, to receive only the enigmatic report from the boys that they left behind what they caught, but brought along what they did not catch. When one knows that it is lice the boys are talking about, there is no puzzle. But we are cautioned by this very fragment not to be deceived by such a straightforward resolution, advised to uncover another, perhaps more powerful significance in what is apparent.

Homer, as the stories relate, is fooled primarily in that he does not know what the boys are talking about, he fails to grasp their *logos*. His failure to catch the significance of the boys' words is a failure to comprehend the meaning and significance of what he hears or otherwise recognizes as a straightforward reporting on a matter that is directly manifest to perception in the appearances of the boys' activity.[18] He perceives quite clearly that the boys are or were fishing, that they have fishing gear and are in surroundings that accord with fishing, and that they must, therefore, be reporting about their success at fishing.[19] But the boys are not reporting about

fishing, except in the sense that they have been 'fishing' for lice, and so the appearances that occur directly and manifestly to Homer's sense perceptions lead him into deception. In that deception, he is like the boys themselves, in that he holds to an understanding that he neither found nor caught, but brought along with him, and in that understanding, finds himself deeply puzzled and without a way to make sense of what is truly a simple, even trivial report. He experiences *aporia*.

The riddle itself is couched as a piece of analogical evidence for Heraclitus' primary observation concerning human understanding: that people are deceived concerning what is manifest *as by a riddle*. In our failure to recognize the obvious, we may indeed be missing some piece of information concerning the apparent, but that information is not some further appearance; it is, instead, as the fragment clearly depicts, a way of ordering the appearances in what we do encounter, and encounter correctly for the most part. Of course, had Homer known in some way that the boys were picking at lice, he would not have been puzzled by their statement. I do not believe, however, that Heraclitus merely wished to make a point concerning the clear fact that we are often not in possession of all the relevant details, that we may never, indeed, receive all the possible pertinent information. If his dictum merely states the banal truth that people are often deceived as a result of what they do not know or experience, it is not worth our attention. Instead, the analogy reports that people are deceived by what is manifestly present to their perceptions, both sense perceptions and noetic perceptions (intellectual apprehensions achieved through *logos*).

There are three points, at least, embedded in this fragment concerning the riddle-like nature of appearance and the relation of sense and noetic perceptions. First, nothing much hinges upon the solution of a riddle. Riddles, once solved, are often trivial and obvious, and, in

so being, thereby take their place among the ranks of all obvious and apparent things, that is, among those things that are in some sense thoroughly deceptive still.[20]

Second, all things manifest present at the same time a less obvious and perhaps even paradoxical pattern of relations that would, if grasped, alter our sense of things, indeed, reorder the relations of sense and appearance. At times, such a reordering produces merely different interpretations, which, whether harmonizing with previous perceptions, or at odds with them, may enrich our understanding, perhaps even lead to a recognition and appreciation of a deeper significance in what has been experienced. At other times, such a reordering can be so striking and profound that it leaves the world and us changed. The example of Homer is not, I would argue, such an instance, but in the fragments as a whole, there is much to indicate that Heraclitus seeks such an outcome for his auditors.

Third, and most important, I believe, Heraclitus depicts Homer as being fooled, not so much about what the boys were doing, since in several senses, regardless of how they spent their time delousing themselves rather than catching fish, they also had been fishing. Nor is he deceived solely by what the boys say, either by failing to grasp their meaning, or by being ignorant of some crucial detail and so erroneously interpreting their report. It is not primarily important that Homer was in this instance puzzled or a bad interpreter. Mistakes of that sort happen often enough to all of us, but are not the real difficulty. What is of primary importance is that Heraclitus depicts Homer as foundering in his encounter with a basic structure of things.

Visible things, Heraclitus tells us in this fragment, are like riddles, and recognizing fully the world of visible things falls along the order of interpreting riddles, in that grasping the world involves grasping that things exhibit a plurality of relations which may shift from manifest to concealed and back depending upon how we take it up. Riddles, we are being shown, are not

presented solely in speech, nor solely, according to the analogy, in appearances. The riddle is a product of the relation of speech and appearance, and in particular, the relation between what speech itself causes to appear for us and appearances perceived by means of the senses. For us, appearances of both sorts, like riddles, often seem clear, all the parts fitting together; but a deeper or richer sense of the world eludes us, unless we are open to an inherent ambiguity in both.

Heraclitus seems to want to show us how our fundamental processes of perception, our impulses toward clarity, toward grasping pattern and order, can flatten the world, reduce it, and bring about important omissions that preclude, or at least, occlude a deeper insight into the nature of things. However, even to become aware that the clarity that appears manifest in what is obvious is woven together with, at the same time, another and less obvious, perhaps more intricate ordering, requires that the appearance of what is obvious be problematized for us in some way. What appears to sense perception is almost never problematized for us except in its relation to the sense that *logos* constructs of those appearances, such as is the case with Homer's troubling experience with the boys. What appears to noetic perception in *logos*, however, may be shown to be problematic, if we are attentive, as Heraclitus would say, to the very *logos* which is its medium. For when we are attentive, we will see that *logos,* like riddles, presents a thing and conceals a thing at the same time.

Homer goes wrong not least of all in that he *supposes* the boys to be riddling him when they are merely recounting their acts, albeit tersely and with an economy of detail not wholly forthcoming; but things also recount themselves, in a sense, tersely and with an economy of detail, and that even before we factor in the manner in which human grasping of that recounting, whether in sense perception or in noetic perception, brings its own shaping, supplementation, omission, and distortion to the process. The message Heraclitus seems to be communicating by

offering this story of riddle as an analogue for his general and provocative claim that people usually fail to recognize what is manifest is that things primarily and perhaps simply recount themselves, but we fail to understand, to recognize the riddling, multivalent manner in which they are accurately representing themselves.

There are fragments that offer further insight into the mechanism of this failure. Hippolytus, who reports the Homer fragment, takes it and the two which precede it in his recounting – B54: "The invisible harmony is stronger than the visible" and B55: "Those things of which there is sight, hearing, and learning from experience: these I honor first" – to indicate that Heraclitus assigned equal value to both the apparent and the unapparent. A significant issue in our failure to recognize what is manifest is our desire for resolution, for seeing things in one way, the "right" way.

Heraclitus asserts in his proem that *Logos*, taken in its fullest sense, simply *is* the ordering principle of the *kosmos*; but so many of his fragments emphasize the sometimes paradoxical plurality of both the world and *logos* wherein the way up is the way down (B60), God is simultaneously day/night, winter/summer, and many other apparent oppositions (B67) and is both willing and unwilling to be called by a single name (B32). In fragments B8, B50, B51, B54 and B114, Heraclitus makes it clear that *logos* shares this multivalency, that *logos*, like the oracle of Apollo in B93, neither precisely speaks out, nor precisely conceals. Rather, he says there, it gives a sign (*sēmainō*). The essential nature of signification is plurality. Heraclitus asserts that what *Logos/logos* orders, what we sometimes like to think of as "reality," standing apart from *logos* as its object, also exhibits an essentially pluralistic and relational character. Reality, the things of our experience, the manifest world, B123 tells us, loves to lie concealed,

but still, it "gives" itself to us, both speaking and concealing, and in so doing, giving a sign: in other words, riddling.

B123 states: "Nature, it hides." The verb he uses, *kruptō*, from which we get the term 'cryptic', when intransitive, means to hide oneself or to conceal. The middle form intensifies the reflexivity. This same term is used in B93 to label one half of what the deity refrains from doing by means of its oracle: neither speaking (*legein*) nor concealing himself (*kruptein*). At first blush, then, these two fragments may seem in tension. The god, Apollo, refrains from hiding, whereas nature loves to conceal itself. But regardless of how much nature may indeed love to conceal itself, it may not wholly do so. The term *phusis*, like *phuē* – form or stature – often meant, simply, 'outward form.'[21] "Nature" is the face the *kosmos* presents to us, and in Plato and Aristotle the term is often used as a synonym for the *kosmos*. "Nature", like the god, fails to accomplish its complete concealment, while simultaneously falling short of complete revelation. As we have been told, what we fail most often to recognize is what is manifest. Of course, we may fail to recognize many other things in addition to what is obvious; but given that in no other fragment does Heraclitus spend any time discussing the inability to recognize what we do not in any way encounter, I believe we may safely regard these fragments as speaking a common theme: that what is obvious deceives because it "gives" itself in signs that neither fully speak, nor fully conceal its nature, and so lead us, if only because of our own impulses to resolution, into deception.

All Things Come to be Through Strife

> The element of thought itself, the element of the life-expression of thought, *language*, is perceptible nature.
>
> — Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*

Before we examine further fragments which also explore the nature of riddles and the amphilogy of *logos*, it may help us to examine briefly the notion of riddle as it existed in early Greek thought. One of the primary terms for riddle was *griphos*. This term denoted a fishing basket or trap, woven of rushes, with which fish are caught, or held and carried. Metaphorically, it came to signify anything intricate, anything which, on account of its intricacy, is made difficult to perceive, and therefore a dark saying or riddle.[22] However, in its original sense, which informs even its metaphorical use, the term denoted something whose main purpose was to catch and to hold, not to lose or to conceal. It is only incidentally the case that something woven intricately enough to capture and hold a fish will also serve to conceal it. Taking the image seriously, we can see that such intricate weavings, carefully designed and crafted, *must* throw into shadow what they catch and hold.

The other common term for riddle was *ainigma*, from which we get the term 'enigma'. However, the notion of weaving was strongly associated with this term as well. Riddles, when labeled *ainigma*, were often expressed in Greek as being *probollein* – put forward or proffered – but they were as often expressed as being *suntithenai*, a difficult term to translate literally, generally denoting construction, and which, in its prefix, emphasizes the joining or gathering aspect of such construction. Further, and most importantly, riddles were often explicitly expressed in Greek as being *plekein* – woven – a term which echoes Plato's *Sophist* and its discussion of the *sumplokē*, the intertwining close engagement of words and forms such that they are able to make and reveal the world.

Both of these terms for riddle, *griphos* and *ainigma plekein*, suggest that a riddle was understood by the Greeks to be carefully crafted through an intricate ordering of its elements that is at least in part intended to *catch* or *gather* something, not lose or obscure it. Riddles are dark

because of their intricate weaving, as a necessary aspect of that weaving, not as goal. They are not intended to defeat understanding. Their complex structure may instead, if engaged correctly, capture understanding, to draw it in and hold it until realization dawns upon the one riddled.

The implication, in Heraclitus, is that the world is like this: complex and intricately ordered, even dark, presenting its face as a riddle, catching and holding us, and in so doing, *not in its solution but in its presentation*, promising, as does the oracle, the possibility of profound understanding. Heraclitus employs such a notion in a number of fragments. We have already noted Hippolytus' association of the Homer fragment with B54: "The unapparent harmony is stronger [or better] than the visible one." When we recall that Nature presents herself in such a way as to both conceal and reveal, we are urged to seek out how what is concealed may be present in what is revealed, producing a harmonious ordering not collapsible to a single perception. There is another fragment which also speaks of 'harmony' that may help us interpret the sense of hidden to which Heraclitus refers in B54. In B51, also reported by Hippolytus, we are told that humans "do not comprehend how a thing agrees while at variance with itself." This fragment is important for understanding opposition, as it states most explicitly, albeit paradoxically, that all things differ with themselves, and, in so doing and at the same time, are in agreement with themselves. However, Heraclitus fears that we will fail to understand this explicit statement and offers two analogues. He remarks that things differ and agree with themselves at the same time by being a harmony, either back-stretched or turning back on itself, as in a bow or lyre.

I believe the analogues serve well to gloss the meaning of the "unapparent harmony" which is "stronger" in B54. The harmony of a bow or a lyre both is and is not hidden. In one sense, their harmony is out in the open, quite visible and obvious for the one who has eyes to see

it. Certainly the appearance of a bow or lyre, lying around not in use, may lead one to interpret its 'harmony' or order as one of peaceful stasis, but the real tension that produces that stasis can be seen in such appearances, if one knows how to recognize it. Such tension is the cause and correct understanding of the manifest appearances. Pick up a bow or a lyre and pluck a string, and the tension through which the bow or the lyre are in fact thereby a bow or lyre is there to perceive. Indeed, one may not need to pluck a string. The tension which holds the whole together is felt in the whole when it is held. An unstrung bow or lyre does not feel at all the same.

These objects further gloss Heraclitus' claim because there are a plurality of tensions within them each capable of foregrounding, but no single one rising to the level of complete explanation. In an important sense, the bow and lyre *are* in a state of peaceful stasis, and in an important sense, they are in violent tension at the same time. Further, the tension that holds the whole together in stasis does so by exerting pressure in opposite directions simultaneously. Were the tension to be exerted in one direction only, the objects would be destroyed, or would certainly cease to be the useful things they are. Indeed, such an oppositional tension occurs naturally and inextricably whenever such objects are busy being what they are, for this is what it is to be strung in tension. When a bow or lyre is being used however, plucked or strummed, or drawn and released, there are other counter-tensions which come into play, which violate the stasis of the foundational tension and which themselves exert and exist as counterbalancing tensions.

The bow and lyre serve as wonderful models for a parallel feature of *logos*: amphilogy. Indeed, perhaps like *logos*, a bow and lyre can only be used, can only accomplish what is their natural function to accomplish, in the very process of balancing a multitude of potentially violent

and counterbalancing tensions, tensions which may strike an observer as chaotic, due to their intricate and complex interactions, but which, nonetheless, exhibit perfect attunement and unity in a number of ways, even differently in different circumstances. If the analogy with *logos* is well taken, then the same would hold true for it. *Logos* must pull even against itself in order to accomplish its harmonious and ordered relating of the world.

I believe that we are explicitly invited to take this fragment as glossing *logos*, at least in part, because *logos* is one of those things, agreeing with itself in differing with itself, about which people prove uncomprehending as we saw in the proem B1. The very thing that people always prove unable to comprehend (*aiei axunetoi*) is the *logos* that Heraclitus both presents and which is the content of that presentation. What they fail to comprehend (*ou xuniasin*), B51 tells us, is how that which differs agrees with itself. Heraclitus' *logos* and *logos* itself exist in a harmony of opposing tensions. The only other use of this term 'uncomprehending,' *axunetos*, in Heraclitus is in B34, where the perception specifically associated with the failure to comprehend is not sight but hearing. There we are told that because people are *axunetoi*, "they hear like the deaf," and further, "there is a saying that bears witness to them: present yet absent." People are unable to comprehend the *logos* that they both hear and do not hear, with the result that both they and the *logos* they do and do not perceive and recognize are both present, in some sense, yet also absent.

The term we are discussing, *axunetos*, is a privative of *sunetos*, which means intelligent, understanding, or wise, and which is formed from the verbal *suniēmi*, which means, etymologically, to bring or set together, but in common usage, to perceive or understand. *Logos* is the noun form of *legein*, which, of course, means to say or to speak, but which also means to lay out before one, to pick out or to gather for oneself.[23] The sense of both of these terms is that

to understand and be intelligent, and to express that understanding in words, is to construct and reconstruct in one's mind and speech the unity of things – existing nevertheless as orderings of opposing tensions – and the unity of the world constituted of things in opposition. *Logos* can do this only because it also exists as an harmonious order of opposing tensions, in which the very violence of that opposition, even to the point of threatening to pull or tear them apart, is the very thing which is the agreement, the saying the same with itself that sustains them.[24]

War is Common and the Father of All

> Everything is pusher or pushed; and matter and mind are in perpetual tilt and balance.
> — Emerson, *Conduct of Life*

For Heraclitus, harmony cannot be found apart from strife and tension, indeed, consists precisely of strife and tension. Even the Greek term *stasis* denoted the kind of balanced tension that Heraclitus notes as existing in all things as it does in the bow or lyre. The term meant, as does ours, a stability or rest, but *also* civil war, sedition, rebellion and discord: that is, the condition of violent opposition with one's own state.[25] The verb, *stasiadzo*, meant primarily to rebel or revolt, to be at odds or quarrel, while the adjective, *stasimos*, meant primarily to be steadfast, steady, or solid. The term exhibited the very tension it denoted.

Heraclitus' proem has more to tell us regarding the unity of oppositions and the structure of unity as opposition itself if we attend to his carefully selected vocabulary and how he plays with his terms. For the back-stretched or back-turning harmony of things, the opposition which is the unapparent order and the very nature of things, is what Heraclitus declares he will analyze and reveal according to its nature: "For, although all things come to pass in accordance with *this particular logos*, people are like those without experience when they experience such words and works *as I relate*, distinguishing each according to its nature and explaining how it is."[26] It is important to attend to the simultaneous distinction and relation Heraclitus emphasizes between

words and deeds.[27] Heraclitus explicitly identifies both the words and the deeds he will relate as products, in some sense, of his own discourse. Heraclitus identifies the words and deeds he will set forth by means of both an indefinite demonstrative pronoun, *toioutos*, a pronoun which points to what precedes, i.e., the words and deeds that people have already experienced, and also an indefinite relative pronoun, *hokoios*. While the demonstrative by itself, with the particular verb of 'relating' that he uses could be taken to refer only to those words and deeds already encountered but not comprehended by his audience, which he will now "go through," showing each for what it is; the indefinite relative, along with the emphatic first person, *egō*, declares some significant degree of proprietorship.

We are led, by a typical Heraclitean calculated ambiguity, to take the referent of these terms to be both those of the world of experience and of Heraclitus' discourse, a further indication of the degree to which those referents are not clearly distinguished in Heraclitus' thought or speech. They are the words and works that *he will set forth*. I believe we would be exhibiting the tunnel vision of our own contemporary categories in uncritically supposing that while the words referred to in this clause may in some sense be those of Heraclitus, the works are only those which occur in the world, related to us in words by Heraclitus. Rather, we should, given his explicit construction, construe the term 'works' to bear some reference to the activity of Heraclitus' telling, and specifically, to the particular communicative strategies that he practices.

The term he uses to label his 'distinguishing' of things according to their nature is *diaireōn*. This is the same term Plato will use to label one constituent element of his *dialectic*, the element that divides things, splitting them into parts, and often into opposites.[28] Heraclitus tells us that he will explain how things are by dividing them into their opposing tensions, that he

will structure his own *logos* as the world of all words and deeds, i.e., all things, is itself structured, so as to faithfully reflect its ordering and invite *aporia*. This structure cannot be found solely at the level of particular words, nor even in the particular formulas that Heraclitus sets forth. Rather it is in the works –the expositional strategies that he employs to articulate the *Logos* – that a value beyond individual expression or the explicit content of that expression is offered.

Heraclitus recognized that we must always fall short of grasping the full significance of particular words and formulas, due both to their obvious sense, which can deceive us because such sense depicts the world too straightforwardly and generatively, and due as well to the sometimes violent tensions of other senses which they contain, since such tensions make univocal sense elusive. By themselves, words, as Parmenides claimed in his Fragment B8, must lead to error since when we name, we "go wrong" by establishing two poles in opposition, such as night and day, whenever any single thing is named. But when words, which can both deceive and illuminate are coupled with a form of expression that capitalizes upon this intrinsic ambiguity and upon the *aporetic* nature of things themselves, ambiguous and paradoxical, and so calls its own expression into question to be puzzled over in what Xenophanes called "long seeking", then perhaps we can approach an understanding of the world that has been possible all along, there in our experience, common to all, and containing the seeds of a faithful understanding of the world.[29]

One of the sources and outlets for this paradoxical unity of oppositions in *logos*, is, for Heraclitus, as it will be for Parmenides, the process and nature of naming. Fragment B51 has told us that we do not comprehend the variant agreement which is the nature of things, as exemplified in the static tension of the bow. Fragment B10 highlights enigmatically this feature

of things and words: "Things taken together: whole, not whole; gathered together, torn apart; harmonious, dissonant. From many things, one; from one, all things." In naming, things are "taken" (*sullabein*), grasped together and collected in a way that necessarily and simultaneously involves separation and distinction and conceals a structural unity, occludes the manner in which they are convergent and divergent, whole and not whole, consonant and dissonant. In naming, the unity of what is named, as distinguished from that which what is named is separated off from, is "taken" as exhibiting discrete identity, and the contrary aspects our grasping leaves behind are labeled by us, as Heraclitus says in B67, as is incense from the alter fire, according to each person's pleasure.[30] Such a "grasping" then requires, in order to explain how it more fully *is*, something like Heraclitus' distinguishing (*diaireōn*), which will confront us again with a paradoxical unity, and perhaps even reveal to us the way in which the names we use, while marking off and separating the world into distinct and independent relations, like life and death, can also, because of their amphilogous nature, call us to recognize an essential unity in paradoxical contrariety. As Heraclitus suggests in B50: "Listening not to me but to the *Logos*, it is wise to agree that all things are one." In the inevitable ambiguity of words, *logos* "says the same" (*homologein*) as reality, but its agreement that all things are one takes the form, paradoxically, of separating, and thereby establishing, the manifold of experience.

Fragment B8 not only stands as one of the more explicitly paradoxical expressions of this unity of opposition, but it also brings together several of the themes found in the other fragments we have discussed which seek to illuminate the nature of unity and opposition in *logos* and reality. It states: "What opposes brings together – from tones at variance comes perfect attunement – and all things come to pass through conflict."[31] Aristotle, the source of this fragment, seems to be summing up what he takes to be the central import of Heraclitus' teaching

on the nature of reality and the nature of *logos*. Since the echoes of these fragments, as well as the explicit associations and paradoxical assertions within them, serve to present *logos* as a relation of violent but ordering opposition, we are led to understand the nature of *logos,* and therefore of understanding, whether in naming or more generally, as exhibiting the selfsame ordering principle as that which composes all stability in the nature of things and orders the *kosmos*. The very term *kosmos* often meant an ordering such as found in lines of battle drawn up in opposition to each other.

These fragments express human *logos* as being itself a part of reality, as well as related to and reflective of its ordering principle, while at the same time a cause of human incomprehension. Human *logos*, like the *Logos* that orders all things, can reveal the world because it both reflects and comprises, in part, the world, isomorphic and mereological. Words, the components of one aspect of human *logos*, while also being themselves bits of the world, point at bits of the world that they themselves are not.[32] They point so as to mark off, divide, and gather together what is in its own nature a unity of opposing tensions, and more problematically, they point so as to name and lead us to believe in an either/or that they inevitably and necessarily present to us in the course of the division and collection whereby all signification occurs and must occur. They seduce and lead astray, as Parmenides warns, in that they are able to make us see what is essentially a unity of pluralities as disjunctive binaries.[33] In other words, words, like our larger discourse with ourselves and each other, present the world in a number of ways, each asking for credence, and each frequently presenting itself as an independent and, often, exclusive truth.

But if it is the case that the very similarity of the structure and nature of both *logos* and the world, the source of its ability to faithfully represent the world and aid understanding, is also

a source of its potential to mislead and betray our understanding, then it is also the case that its ability to mislead us into the either/or of false polarities and exclusive competing truth claims is itself the result of the ability of *logos* to produce harmony, order and stability. It is because *logos* can structure the world for us, can identify and assign being, can make sense and create or uncover meaning, that it can also deceive us. In such an understanding of *logos*, wherein its power to reveal is the source of its power to conceal, and its power to mislead and falsify is the source of its power to create order and stability, we have another example of the relation of opposition that Heraclitus insists to us serves to produce the most perfect attunement.

Words and Deeds

> The contradictions the mind comes up against – these are the only realities: they are the criterion of the real. There is no contradiction in what is imaginary. Contradiction is the test of necessity… In the same way all truth contains a contradiction. The union of contradictories involves a wrenching apart… Simultaneous existence of incompatible things in the soul's bearing; balance which leans both ways at once: that is saintliness, the actual realization of the microcosm, the imitation of the order of the world.
>
> — Simone Weil

I have suggested repeatedly that it is not primarily through the content of the individual fragments that Heraclitus attempts to teach us about how to inquire into and articulate our understanding of the world, but in his "deeds," understood as his communicative practice. We have seen that practice calling attention to the partiality of any articulation of reality as discrete things. The most paradoxical fragments – B10, B62, B51, B8 – suggest, if nothing else, that seeing things as independent polarities is a partial seeing at best. That is why Heraclitus urges us to listen to the *logos*, as much to experience what it *does* as to hear what it says. His practice prompts us not so much to see opposition in what is experienced as unity, or, just as importantly, to see unity in what is opposed, but primarily to examine the way in which *logos* presents the world noetically so as to cause the partiality (in both senses) which falsifies what it

represents. But it also urges us to continue seeking, to allow ourselves to be grasped by that *logos* in ways that may remedy that very partiality and provide a fuller sense of the structure of things. It is because it is the cause of our misunderstanding in the particular way it is that allows it to serve as the best correction. The either/or that *logos* produces is the key to the successful grasping of the world as well. The dynamic tension created by the either/or, when it is kept alive, when resolution is resisted, in the sense that a choice is avoided concerning the contrariety, when its paradoxical oppositions are held in a balance, offers an understanding of reality that promises an important degree of faithfulness to things, and some assurance of correct understanding; less perhaps than the gods may enjoy, but enough for hope in judgment, as Xenophanes suggests.

Such is the nature of *logos*. It makes partial perspectives on the world inevitable, but it also makes grasping its own partiality possible, and in so doing, makes possible as well an understanding of the relation of incomplete and partial perspectives to the whole of which they are an experience. However, if something like this interpretation is correct in the sense that it is faithful to what Heraclitus believed concerning the relation of *logos* to reality, then Kahn's summary is made more poignant, and our failure to grasp what is manifestly apparent is the greatest riddle of all. As Heraclitus asks in B16: "How can one hide from that which never sets?" How can what is most luminously, and even self-expressively manifest be so difficult to recognize? Of course, we have been talking about the nature of *logos* as agreeing with, saying the same as, the nature of reality, and in so doing, both speaking out and concealing the nature of that reality. A sun that never sets is, in an important sense, precisely what is created by our *logos* of the world, by our naming, wherein what we name is bound, tied down, and made static,

indeed, left behind. Such a sun is the most readily hidden from or forgotten, since it is, again in an important sense, no longer what is really there to be present to or remember.

In language we face the almost impossible task of presenting and signifying the world to ourselves and communicating our conceptions to others. Both discourse and individual words are required to do their work under the almost impossible condition that they be both particular and universal, both private and public, both constructive and revelatory of meaning. Words and discourse must both separate out and communicate the world. Words, after all, are signs that point toward what they are not, and so suffer from the defect that Plato notes in the *Seventh Letter* (343b7-e1) that, in general, they are not bound indissolubly to things, with the result that they can be used to signify different bits of the world and even transferred from one thing to another. It is perhaps these impossibly conjoined demands that also impart to *logos* an efficacy at molding both the world and people's minds and hearts, of enabling one, as was feared, to accomplish whatever one wishes, so much so that it is not the truth that need be considered or appealed to, but only the proper and properly spoken words. If, indeed, man is the measure of all things, as Protagoras suggests, then he is that measure by virtue of *logos*.

The Greeks had a term for the fullest possible comprehension of the order of things and richest grasp of the significance of what appears: *to noein*. Heraclitus speaks of the noun form of this term, *nous* – understanding – in only one fragment, but it is a fragment that ties the threads we have been following together and restates, in kind, the relation of cognition to the world of our experience. In B114, we are told: "Speaking with understanding (*xun noē*) they must hold fast to what is shared (*xunō*) by all, even more firmly than a city holds to its law. For all human laws are nourished by one which is divine, which prevails as it will, and suffices for all and is more than enough."[34] Heraclitus repeatedly insists that the one law which is divine is *Logos*: a

logos which prevails over all and is sufficient and more than sufficient, as he says. What B114 adds is that understanding is based upon what is shared. Understanding is not grounded in what is isolated, either objects or conditions or states of affairs, but what is complex and rich and holds for all things, not individual experience, but the nature and order of all things, and therefore of all experience as well. One does not understand individual things, then, but, if at all, a part, at most, of the vast and complex order of relations, reflected, fortunately for us, in the structure of *logos* itself.

In other words, we must understand that there is not properly a distinction between thinking and encountering, as if one happens and the other is merely a process that interprets what happens; but rather that encountering *is* itself a thinking, a way of addressing the world, and that way holds, within its own tensions, the key to holding fast to the world it articulates (in both senses). Therefore, in comprehending our own processes of comprehension we will properly understand the relation of experience to reality as a "making" which bears false witness, but which also seizes us and brings us into play again with what is witnessed, if we will allow it to, if we will "listen" rightly to the *logos* of its *logos*. We will hear the *logos* speaking with its studied ambiguity, in riddles that *seek* paradox and, in paradox, call us into play with the nature of reality. We need not self-consciously speak in the same fashion. If we really understand the import of Heraclitus' riddles, we will recognize that we always already are.

Riddles, for Heraclitus, illuminate the way in which we fail to comprehend our own comprehending, and so illuminate the way that understanding itself works. That failure is the failure to grasp the unity of the tension between the way appearance falsifies reality and relates reality at the same time, and the way that reality reveals itself in appearance and lies concealed at the same time. Heraclitean expositional strategy, in capitalizing on the structure of riddles,

which highlights the structure of *logos*, seeks to express a world that simply gives itself *as* a riddle. Even the most cursory observation of the world, and the early Greeks were far more than cursory observers, reveals a tension, an irresoluble and even violent tension, in reality, evidenced clearly in such deeply puzzling relations as being to becoming, permanence to change, and, perhaps most puzzling of all, at least for Plato, plurality to unity.

Heraclitus practices a deeply puzzling and paradoxical ambiguity himself as a strategy for bringing us back into play with the matter and form of our particular *logos*. He practices a distorting violence, just such as *logos* itself perpetrates, so as to lead us to grasp that structure and dynamic, both through and beyond our grasping of the nature of our articulation of reality. He tells us, in Heraclitean fashion, that is, paradoxically, that there is a way of being at odds with that which we most closely associate such that we fall into error; but he also tells us that there is a way which leads to insight, about ourselves, our worlds, and our ways of knowing. And the name of those two ways is the same: *logos*.

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[1] Osborne 1987:21 has this to say regarding Heraclitus: "Heraclitus uses [*logos*] in extremely novel ways; he formulates the first conception of rational [*psyche*]; he is (apparently) the first philosopher to consciously employ the principle of 'like-to-like;' he is probably the first philosopher to draw inferences from reflecting on language; and (as far as the evidence shows) he coins a number of new words. All in all, Heraclitus seems to be at least as original, relative to his antecedents, as Plato is, relative to the Presocratics." Kahn 1979:x, 7 compares Heraclitus' skill in literary composition to Aeschylus and Pindar, Dante and Plato, and ranks him as a more original thinker, crafting "carefully articulated movement[s] from image to aphorism, from myth to riddle to contemporary allusion" the content of which comprise "a chain of statements linked together not by a logical argument but by interlocking ideas, imagery, and verbal echoes." Diels' dissenting view, like that of Theophrastus (cited in Diogenes Laertius IX, 6) and most of the other commentators on Heraclitus who rank him as a physical or cosmological thinker, was that he either tried intentionally to obfuscate, out of perversity or misanthropy, it would seem, what could have been stated in much clearer terms; or that his speaking must inevitably result in obfuscation since that speaking lacked the precise linguistic and analytic tools necessary to expound physical theory of the sort which they take him to be presenting.

[2] The term Timon, the third-century satirist, used is *ainiktēs*. Diels, Fr. 43.

[3] *Lives*, II.22. In his section on Heraclitus, IX.12, Diogenes also relates that Seleucus, the grammarian, quoting Croton's book *The Diver*, relates that someone named Crates was the one who brought the book to Athens and is the one who said that it requires a Delian diver not to be drowned in it.

[4] *Lives* IX.6. Cf. Kirk, Raven and Schofield 1983:185.

[5] 1983:186.

[6] *Lives* IX.6.

[7] This letter is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria in *Strom*.i.65 and quoted by Diogenes in *Lives* IX.13.

[8] *Anth. Pal.* Ix.540 quoted in *Lives* IX.16.

[9] *Lives* IX.15.

[10] Cf., e.g., Hussey 1982, and Hölscher 1974. Wilcox 1994 argues, much like Hölscher, that Heraclitus thinks the world is a puzzle that must be properly interpreted to be understood and so presents his writing as illustrations both of puzzle and of interpretation. Diels, in the introduction to his *Herakleitos von Ephesos* suggests that Heraclitus wrote in an oracular style because it was the fashion of his time. This suggestion relies upon a very general sense of "his time" and ignores the important differences between Heraclitus' style and those of his surviving contemporaries.

[11] Cf. Kahn 1979:91.

[12] Hölscher 1982:235-6.

[13] Fr. 1. All translations are mine.

[14] Against the Mathematicians VII.126.

[15] Emlyn-Jones 1976:99-101, has remarked that Heraclitus' riddles, for those few who are able to listen to the *logos*, those who are not uncomprehending by cutting themselves off from what is common -- *axunetoi* -- the riddle is exhaustive and self-explanatory. She states: "The assertion was, in a sense, its own explanation, since the relationship between opposites was displayed as self-evident in language, which, [Heraclitus] believed, reflected the structure of reality. Explanation was neither necessary nor even possible."

[16] Kahn 1979:99.

[17] These may be found in the *Lives*, V and VI, and surveyed and discussed in Kirk 1983.

[18] My use of these terms, and my understanding of them in this context, echoes the analysis of Von Fritz 1974.

[19] Homer is, of course, blind, and this fact is noted and even emphasized in several of the versions of the story. This fact renders the riddle more poignant and its use by Heraclitus more pointed. Homer's blindness removes for him a primary vehicle of sense perception, but should not be taken to either benefit him with some superior state of understanding or unusually hinder his understanding, since Homer was fooled specifically because he was unable to accommodate his sense of the account the boys provided with his perception (however derived) of their activity.

[20] Plato repeatedly laments this feature of human cognition when he has Socrates demonstrate or explicitly assert that the greatest danger for human understanding is to become convinced that the plain, manifest sense of our cognitions and perceptions exhaust their possible meanings and exhaustively relate the world. To inhabit such an interpretive stance with respect to *logos* and to perception is to fall prey to the belief that we know what we do not know, and, in our complacency, to cease searching for richer understanding.

[21] Cf. Herodotus 8.38, Pindar's *Nemean Odes* 6.5, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* 740, Euripides' *Bacchae* 1358, or Aristophanes' *Vespae* 1071.

[22] Heraclitus, the speaker of dark sayings, was often labeled *ho skoteinos*, the dark or the obscure. Interestingly, if not also ironically, when used of persons, the term also meant 'blind.'

[23] Cf. LSJ *s.v.* Heidegger 1968 makes a great deal of this conjunction of meanings, but he is not the only scholar to note these multiple meanings and to make use of them in interpreting Heraclitus or even Plato. The signification of gathering and picking out was more primitive, but these uses were also contemporary with the more common signification of speaking, and are the source for several alternate meanings of the term *logos*, such as 'account' in the statistical or bookkeeping sense, and also 'measure', 'ratio', and 'orderly relationship'. It is quite interesting, of course, to note the conjunction of the sense of 'gathering' in *legein* and the sense of gathering or collecting or joining in several of the terms for riddling or riddles: *ainigma suntithenai, ainigma plekein,* and *griphos*.

[24] In B51, the phrase *diapheromenon heōutōi homolegeei*, when read etymologically, can be rendered something like: borne apart with respect to itself in different directions it is gathered together with itself. Our term 'differ' is a fairly direct transmission of the Greek through the Latin transposition *differre*. The term means, in Greek, to be at variance or odds, but also to tear asunder. It also commonly meant to surpass or to excel, and Herodotus and Thucydides both used the term to speak of enduring or sustaining. Cf. LSJ *s.v.* It is perhaps illuminating to note the coincidence of the semi-homophones *diapherō*, to differ, and *diaphtheirō*, to destroy utterly or to corrupt, and which was used in an idiom, *d. chera*, meaning to ruin by *weakening or slackening* one's hand, as in, one may readily surmise, the destruction which follows upon the slackening of the tension in bow or lyre.

[25] Cf. Plato's *Sophist*, 228a-d, where the Stranger uses the term to mean discord and equates it with disease,

and further defines both as the disagreement, *diaphora*, of the naturally related brought about by some corruption, διαφθορ□. In that discussion he offers that opinions and desires, reason and pain, anger and pleasure are opposed in the souls of worthless men, but must nevertheless be naturally related.

[26] Emphasis added to highlight features of expression engaged in the following analysis. Scholars have noted that Heraclitus, in this proem and in other fragments, identifies his own particular account with the *Logos* which serves as the ordering principle and source of all things. Verdenius 1947: 277 has stated that for Heraclitus, "there is no fundamental difference between the meaning of his doctrine and the order in the real world." Kahn 1979 has stated the same sentiment, with poetic flair, when he speaks of Heraclitus as a "prophet of the *logos*" who speaks not in his own name or voice, but such that the *Logos*, immanent *in* his utterances, can be recognized and understood through his utterances, the structure of which intends and points at the structure of the world itself and not the structure of his *thought about* the world.

[27] This distinction and relation will play a tremendous role in the writings of later thinkers, especially Thucydides, Gorgias, and Plato. Solon is credited with originating the distinction.

[28] Plato's method of "dialectic", as he articulates it in several dialogues (e.g., *Sophist* and *Philebus*), consists of two component methods: *diairesis* and *sunagōgē*, division and collection.

[29] Parmenides warns that both experience and names lead one astray and perplex, but that a "much-contested refutational logos" can reveal the truth about things. Xenophanes claims that the gods do not reveal all things to mortals, but, through sustained inquiry we can come to know more fully.

[30] B67: "God: day/night, winter/summer, war/peace, satiety/hunger. It alters, as when mingled with the smoke of incense, it gets named according to the pleasure of each one."

[31] The term here is *antixoun*, a word with some phonetic echoes to *xunon* – common- and *axunetos* - uncomprehending. It is an Ionic term meaning "opposition", and in its verbal form, "to set against". Kahn 1979 translates the term as "counter-thrust." The sense is that opposition brings together, a sense which echoes both B51and B10. The same term for "brings together," *sumpheron*, is used in all of these fragments. In this fragment the two – opposition and that which is at variance with itself are explicitly associated, and the term Kahn also translates as "tones at variance" is also the same term used in B10 and B51. This fragment also echoes B80 on the ordering principle of strife, and B10, B51, and B54 on the nature of harmony and its analogical import with respect to the order of reality.

[32] Frye 1957 asserts that words are in tension between being centripetal, in that they are something in themselves and point inwardly at themselves, and being centrifugal, in that they point outward at what they are not.

[33] This was, largely, Parmenides' complaint in B8.

[34] Kahn 1979: 117-118 discusses the several word plays on common/with understanding and understanding/ common/law, and also notes the syntactical ambiguity present in this passage as in several others that occurs as a result of a masculine-neuter (animate/inanimate) ambiguity in the terms.

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