

## Heraclitus\*

According to Diogenes Laertius, Heraclitus of Ephesus was born about 540. he was a member of one of the aristocratic families of Ephesus, but tradition tells us that he turned his back on the political life usually associated with such an upbringing, resigning a hereditary ruling position to his brother. He had a reputation for both misanthropy and obscurity (one of his traditional nicknames was “the Riddler”). The former is probably based on his rude references to a number of historians and other philosophers and the latter on the enigmatic paradoxes he generates in expounding his views. He wrote a single book, of which fragment 1 is apparently the opening. Although he made a number of claims about the nature of the universe, he seems to have been as interested in exploring questions about knowledge and the human condition as in exploring cosmological issues (many of his cosmological views can be traced to Xenophanes). He argued that there was a single divine law of the universe, which he called the *logos*, which rules and guides the cosmos. (the word *logos* means, among other things, “account”, and “thing said” or “word”; like our notion of given an account, to give a *logos* is to give an explanation as well as simply to say something.) Although the *logos* is an independent, objective truth available to all, Heraclitus claimed that most people do not exercise their abilities to come to understand it, acting instead as if they are asleep and in a private world. He thus attempted to bridge the gap between divine and human knowledge pointed out by Xenophanes and Alcmaeon by claiming that there was a link between the divine *logos* (the account of what there is) and the souls of human beings. Thus Heraclitus claimed that there is a possibility of acquiring sure and certain knowledge, though he ridiculed the wide interests of his predecessors Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes, and Hecataeus (an early Ionian writer of history or mythography ca. 500). “Much learning”, he said,

“does not teach understanding”. The simple collection of facts will not result in knowledge; rather, there must be insight into and understanding of the significance of these fates. A fundamental part of this insight is seeing how all that is known constitutes a unity. Heraclitus himself offered signs of this unity in his paradoxes about the unity of opposites. He insisted that, despite the fact that there is universal change, there is a single, unchanging, law of the cosmos -- the *logos* which both underlies and governs these changes. Thus one who understands the *logos* can understand the workings of the cosmos. The physical sign or manifestation of the *logos* is fire, an element that is always changing, yet always the same.

1. This *logos* 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 [or, happen] in accordance with this *logos*, 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. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.132 = 22B1)
2. For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the *logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.133 = 22B2)
3. For many, in fact all that come upon them, do not understand such things, nor when they have noticed them do they know them, but they seem to themselves <to do so>. (Clement, *Miscellanies* 2.8.1 = 22B17)
7. They are at odds with the *logos*, with which above all they are in continuous contact, and the things they meet every day appear strange to them. (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 4.46 = 22B72)

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\* Excerpts from *A Presocratic Reader*, P. Curd (ed.), translations by R. Mckirahan, Jr., 1996, pp. 29-40.

14. Much learning (“polymathy”) does not teach insight.  
Otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and  
moreover Xenophanes and Hecataeus. (Diogenes Laertius,  
*Lives of the Philosophers* 9.1 = 22B40)
16. Heraclitus said that Homer deserved to be expelled from the  
contests and flogged, and Archilochus likewise.  
(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.1 = 22B42)
29. It belongs to all people to know themselves and to think rightly.  
(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.5.6 = 22B116)
33. Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.  
(Polybius, *Histories* 12.27.1 = 22B101a)
39. Nature loves to hide.  
(Themistius, *Orations* 5.69b = 22B123)
51. Pigs rejoice in mud more than pure water.  
(Clement, *Miscellanies* 1.2.2 = 22B13)
52. Asses would choose rubbish rather than gold.  
(Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.5.1176a7 = 22B9)
53. We would call oxen happy when they find bitter vetch to eat.  
(Albertus Magnus, *On Vegetables* 6.401 = 22B4)
60. The road up and the road down are one and the same.  
(Hippolytus, *Refutation* 9.10.4 = 22B60)
61. Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and again  
different waters flow.  
(Arius Didymus, Fr. 39.2 (*Dox. gr.* 471.4) = 22B12)
62. [It is not possible to step twice into the same river] ... It scatters  
and again comes together, and approaches and recedes.  
(Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 392b = 22B91a, b)
63. We step into and we do not step into the same rivers. We are  
and we are not.  
(Heraclitus, *Homeric Questions* 24 Oelmann (Schleiermacher, fr.  
72) = 22B49a)
64. The beginning and the end are common on the circumference of  
a circle.  
(Porphyry, *Notes on Homer* (On *Iliad* 24.200) = 22B103)
72. The turnings of fire: first, sea; and of sea, half is earth and half  
fiery waterspout ... Earth is poured out as sea, and is measured  
according to the same ratio (logos) it was before it became  
earth.  
(Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.104.3, 5 = 22B31a, b)
73. Fire lives the death of earth and air lives the death of fire,  
water lives the death of air, earth that of water.  
(Maximus of Tyre 41.4 = 22B76a)
74. The cosmos, the same for all, none of the gods nor of humans  
has made, but it was always and is and shall be: an ever-living  
fire being kindled in measures and being extinguished in  
measures.  
(Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.103.6 = 22B30)
75. Changing, it rests. (Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1 = 22B84a; minor  
rev. Curd)
77. All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things, as  
goods for gold and gold for goods.  
(Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 338d-e = 22B90)
81. For fire will advance and judge and convict all things.

(Hippolytus, *Refutations* 9.10.6 = 22B66)

82. Fire is want and satiety.

(Hippolytus, *Refutations* 9.10.7 = 22B65)

104. You would not discover the limits of the soul although you traveled every road: it has so deep a logos.

(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.7 = 22B45)

105. The soul has a self-increasing logos.

(Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.180a = 22B115)

## Parmenides\*

*The best reports on the life of Parmenides of Elea suggest that he was born about 515. Diogenes Laertius says that he was a student of Xenophanes “but did not follow him” and that he was also associated at some time in his life with the Pythagoreans although he rejected their theories as well. There is no way of knowing whether or not these reports are true, and it may be that certain similarities between Parmenides’ account of being and Xenophanes’ account of the single god is the source of the claim about that connection. It is less surprising that Parmenides should have been associated with the Pythagoreans, as Elea is in Southern Italy, home of the Pythagorean movement. Like Xenophanes, Parmenides wrote in verse: His poem is in Homeric hexameters, and there are many Homeric images in it, especially from the Odyssey. In the poem, Parmenides presents himself as being taken in a chariot to meet a goddess, who tells him that he will learn “all things”, and assures him that what he is to be told is sure and certain, but adds that he himself must assess the*

*arguments she gives. Parmenides is one of the most controversial figures among the Presocratics, and there is no general agreement among scholars about the details of his theory. In the section of the poem traditionally called Truth, Parmenides argues that genuine thought and knowledge can be only about what is, for what is not is literally unsayable and unthinkable. Parmenides rejects what he falls the “beliefs of mortals” that are based on sense experience and in which there can be “no true trust”. Rather, one must judge by understanding what follows from the claim that what-is can be and that what-is-not cannot be or even be thought of. Parmenides proceeds to explore the features of genuine being: What is must be whole, complete, unchanging (it can neither come to be nor pass away, nor can it undergo any qualitative change), and one. Only what has these features can be grasped by the understanding and genuinely known. Given Parmenides’ arguments, it becomes clear that the theories of the Milesians, in which a single stuff actually undergoes changes so as to become something else; of Heraclitus, in which opposites are a genuine unity, so that what is both is and is not; and of the Pythagoreans, where opposites are the basis of number, are unacceptable to Parmenides. One of the aspects of Parmenides’ work that is particularly intriguing to modern scholars is that, having apparently rejected the changing world as literally unreal, he presents the goddess as giving a cosmological account of the universe -- traditionally called the Doxa (“beliefs” or “opinions”) -- an account that the goddess claims to be deceptive. Is this cosmology supposed to be a parody of other cosmological accounts? Is it perhaps the best that can be said for the physical world? Or is the Goddess giving a lesson so that the hearer who understands both the nature of what-is and the nature of the deception in the cosmology could give an acceptable cosmological account? Parmenides’ interest in metaphysics and epistemology is connected with similar interests in Xenophanes and Heraclitus, but Parmenides was the first Western philosopher to see the importance of meta-theoretical questions about the nature of philosophical theories, and to provide comprehensive arguments for his claims. His arguments were powerful, and his views about knowledge, being, and change became a serious challenge*

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\* Excerpts from *A Presocratic Reader*, P. Curd (ed.), translations by R. Mckirahan, Jr., 1996, pp. 43-51.

*not only for the Presocratic philosophers who came after him, but for Plato and Aristotle as well.*

1. The mares which carry me as far as my spirit ever aspired were escorting me, when they brought me and proceeded along the renowned road of the goddess, which brings a knowing mortal to all cities one by one. On this path I was being brought, on it wise mares were bringing me, straining the chariot, and maidens were guiding the way. The axle in the center of the wheel was shrilling forth the bright sound of a musical pipe, ablaze, for it was being driven forward by two rounded wheels at either end, as the daughters of the Sun were hastening to escort <me> after leaving the house of Night for the light, having pushed back the veils from their heads with their hands. There are the gates of the roads of Night and Day, and a lintel and a stone threshold contain them. High in the sky they are filled by huge doors of which avenging Justice holds the keys that fit them. The maidens beguiled her with soft words and skillfully persuaded her to push back the bar from them quickly from the gates. The made a gaping gap of the doors when they opened them, swinging in turn in their sockets the bronze posts fastened with bolts and rivets. There, straight through them then, the maidens held the chariot and horses on the broad road. And the goddess received me kindly, took my right hand in hers, and addressed me with these words: Young man, accompanied by immortal charioteers, who reach my house by the horses which bring you, welcome -- since it was not an evil destiny that sent you forth

to travel  
this road (for indeed it is far from the beaten path of humans),  
but Right and Justice. There is need for you to learn all things

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both the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth  
and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance.  
But nevertheless you will learn these too -- that the things that  
appear  
must genuinely be, being always, indeed, all things.

(lines 1-30: Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.111-114;

lines 28-32: Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's On the Heavens* 557.25-558.2 = 28B1)

2. Come now, I will tell you -- and bring away my story safely when you have heard it -- the only ways of inquiry there are for thinking: the one, that it is and that it is not possible for it not to be, is the path of Persuasion (for it attends upon Truth), the other, that it is not and that it is necessary for it not to be, this I point out to you to be a path completely unlearnable, for neither my you know that which is not (for it is not to be accomplished) nor may you declare it. (Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* 1.345.18; lines 3-8. Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 116.28 = 28B.2; rev. Curd)
3. ... For the same thing is for thinking and for being. (Clement, *Miscellanies* 6.23; Plotinus 5.1.8 = 28B3)
4. But gaze upon things which although absent are securely present in thought. For you will not cut off what is from clinging to what is, neither being scattered everywhere in every way in order nor being brought together.

(Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.15.5 = 28B4; rev. Curd)

5. And it is all common to me  
From where I am to begin; for to there shall I come back again.  
(Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* 1.708 (16  
Cousin) = 28B4; tr. Curd)
  
6. That which is there to be spoken and thought of must be.  
For it is possible for it to be,  
but not possible for nothing to be. I bid you consider this.  
For <I bar> you from this first way of inquiry,  
but next from the way on which mortals, knowing nothing,  
two-headed, wander. For helplessness  
in their breasts guides their wandering mind. But they are  
carried on  
equally deaf and blind, amazed, hordes without judgment,  
for whom both to be and not to be are judged the same and  
not the same, and the path of all is backward-turning.  
(Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 86.27-28;  
117.4-13 = 28B5; slightly rev. Curd)
  
7. For in no way may this prevail, that things that are not, are.  
But you, bar your thought from this way of inquiry,  
and do not let habit born from much experience compel you  
along this way  
to direct your sightless eye and sounding ear and tongue,  
but judge by reason the heavily contested testing  
spoken by me.  
(lines 1-2; Plato, *Sophist* 242a; lines 2-6, Sextus Empiricus,  
*Against the Mathematicians* 7.114 = 28B7)
  
8. There is still left a single story  
of a way, that it is. On this way there are signs  
exceedingly many -- that being ungenerated it is also  
imperishable,  
whole and of a single kind and unshaken and complete.

Nor was it ever nor will it be, since it is now, all together  
one, continuous. For what birth will you seek for it?  
How and from where did it grow? I will not permit you to say  
or to think <that it grew> from what is not; for it is not to be  
said or thought  
that it is not. What necessity would have stirred it up  
to grow later rather than earlier, beginning from nothing?  
Thus it must either fully be or not.  
Nor will the force of conviction ever permit anything to come to  
be  
from what is not beside it. For this reason, Justice has  
permitted it  
neither to come to be nor to perish, relaxing her shackles,  
but holds fast. But the decision about these matters lies in this:  
it is or it is not. but it has been decided, as is necessary,  
to let go the one way as unthinkable and nameless (for it is not  
a true way) and that the other is and is real.  
How could what is be in the future? How could it come to be?  
For if it came into being, it is not, nor if it is ever going to be.  
In this way, coming to be has been extinguished and destruction  
is unheard of.  
Nor is it divided, since it all is alike;  
nor is it any more in any way, which would keep it from  
holding together,  
or any less, but it is all full of what is.  
Therefore, it is all continuous, for what is draws near to what  
is.  
but unchanging in the limits of great bonds,  
it is without start or finish, since coming to be and destruction  
were banished far away and true conviction drove them off.  
Remaining the same in the same and by itself it lies  
and so stays there fixed; for might Necessity  
holds it in the bonds of a limit, which pens it in all round,  
since it is right for what is to be not incomplete;  
for it is not lacking; if it were, it would lack everything.  
Thinking and the thought that it is are the same.

For not without what is, in which it is expressed,  
 will you find thinking; for nothing else either is or will be  
 except that which is, since Fate shackled it  
 to be whole and unchanging; wherefore it has been named all  
 things  
 mortals have established, persuaded that they are true --  
 to come to be and to perish, to be and not <to be>,  
 and to change place and alter bright color.  
 But since there is a furthest limit, it is complete,  
 on all sides like the bulk of a well-rounded ball,  
 evenly balanced in every way from the middle; for it must be  
 not at all greater  
 or smaller here than there.  
 For neither is there what is not -- which would stop it from  
 reaching  
 its like -- nor is what is in such a way that there could be more  
 of what is  
 here and less there, since it is all inviolate;  
 for equal to itself on all sides, it meets with its limits uniformly.  
 At this point I stop for you my reliable account and thought  
 concerning Truth; from here on, learn mortal opinions,  
 listening to the deceitful ordering of my words.  
 For they made up their minds to name two forms,  
 of which it is not right to name one -- in this they have gone  
 astray --  
 and they distinguished things opposite in body, and established  
 signs  
 apart from one another -- for one, the aetherial fire of flame,  
 mild, very light, the same as itself in every direction,  
 but not the same as the other; but that other one, in itself  
 is opposite -- dark night, a dense and heavy body.  
 I declare to you all the ordering as it appears,  
 so that no mortal opinion my ever overtake you.  
 (Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 145.1-146.25  
 (lines 1-52); 39.1-9 (lines 50-61) = 28B8; revised Curd)

9. But since all things have been named light and night  
 and the things which accord with their powers have been  
 assigned to these things and those,  
 all is full of light and obscure night together,  
 of both equally, since nothing shares in neither.  
 (Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 180.9-12 =  
 28B9; rev. Curd)
10. You shall know the nature of the aether and all the signs in the  
 aether  
 and the destructive deeds of the shining sun's pure  
 torch and whence they came to be,  
 and you shall learn the wandering deeds of the round-faced  
 moon  
 and its nature, and you shall know also the surrounding heaven,  
 from what it grew and how Necessity led and shackled it  
 to hold the limits of the stars.  
 (Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.14, 138.1 = 28B10)
11. ... how earth and sun and moon  
 and the aether which is common to all and the Milky Way and  
 furthest Olympus and the hot force of the stars surged forth  
 to come to be.  
 (Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's On the Heavens*  
 559.22-25 = 28B11)
12. For the narrower <wreaths> were filled with unmixed fire.  
 The ones next to them with night, but a due amount of fire is  
 inserted among it,  
 and in the middle of these is the goddess who governs all  
 things.  
 for she rules over hateful birth and union of all things,  
 sending the female to unite with male and in opposite fashion,  
 male to female.  
 (Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 39.14-16  
 (lines 1-3); 31.13-17 (lines 2-6) = 28B12)

13. First of all gods she contrived Love.  
(Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Physics* 39.18 = 28B13)
14. Night-shining foreign light wandering round earth.  
(Plutarch, *Against Colores* 1116A = 28B14)
15. Always looking towards the rays of the sun.  
(Plutarch, *On the Face in the Moon* 929AB = 28B15)
16. For as each person has a mixture of much-wandering limbs,  
so is thought present to humans. For that which thinks --  
the constitution of the limbs -- is the same  
in all humans and every one; for which is more is thought.  
(Theophrastus, *On the Senses* 3 = 28B16)
17. [That the male is conceived in the right part of the  
uterus has been said by others of the ancients.  
For Parmenides says:]  
<The goddess brought> boys <into being> on the right  
<side of the uterus>, girls on the left.  
(Galen, *Commentary on Book VI of Hippocrates' Epidemics*  
*II*, 46 = 28B17)
18. In this way, according to opinion, these things have grown and  
now are  
and afterwards after growing up will come to an end.  
And upon them humans have established a name to mark each  
one.  
(Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle's On the Heavens*  
558.9-11 = 28B19)
19. Such, unchanging, is that for which as a whole the name is "to  
be".  
(Plato, *Theaetetus* 180e1 = "The Conford Fragment")