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3 The Problem of Evil in Heraclitus

I

The frequent quotation of Heraclitus by later philosophers resulted in an unusually large number of surviving fragments, but the fragments are brief—even the longest is only three sentences, while in some cases the later writers quoted only a single word. According to the Diels-Kranz edition about 120 fragments survive, but they add up to only about 1,000 words. The brevity of even the longest ones suggests that Heraclitus wrote in a terse epigrammatic style, but there is no independent evidence for it. And since we do not know the order in which they appeared in his writings, we do not know how they may have been meant to reflect on and amplify one another; nor is there always agreement as to which fragments are actual quotations rather than paraphrases or misquotations. Consequently, every attempt by editors or translators to put them into a coherent order results in a different mosaic.[1] Moreover, although

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1. Thus Heidegger criticizes Eugen Fink for beginning his interpretation from a fragment that enables him to give disproportionate weight to the concept of light, namely B64: "The lightning bolt steers all." See Fink and Heidegger, *Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67* (hereafter *Heraclitus Seminar*), 135. It was only the prominence that Fink gave to this fragment that troubled Heidegger; Fink's interpretation of it derived from an essay by Heidegger himself: "Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 207–29: 222, 229. Heidegger's own point of departure was B1, which focuses on the concept of *logos*.

The most ambitious attempt to order the fragments coherently is that of Charles Kahn's

it is sometimes obvious that Heraclitus is speaking literally, and at other times obvious that he is speaking metaphorically, he can often be interpreted either way with very different results.[2]

The longest fragment, which according to Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus was the opening of his book,[3] begins:

> 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 in accordance with this *logos*, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out . . . (B1)[4]

That is what he means in B123 when he says that "nature loves to hide." He makes a similar point in B72, saying that people "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." It is best to leave the term "*logos*" untranslated to preserve its wide range of meanings: word, statement, argument, definition, account, speech, language, reason, ratio, etc.[5] Why do we fail to recognize *logos* even though it is ever present to us?

The Thought and Art of Heraclitus, which results in a plausible and illuminating arrangement. At the same time, Kahn's sensitivity to the systematic ambiguity and multiple implications of Heraclitus's style has the effect of making us aware that fragments that are grouped together by virtue of one of their implications could have been differently grouped by virtue of other implications.

2. *HGP*, vol. I, 427: "It is discouraging, certainly, to note how many different impressions of this world-view have been put forward in the past and continue to be put forward; but one can only give one's own." Cf. Heidegger's "Aletheai (Heraklit, Fragment 16)" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 257–82: "What would be achieved if one wished to reject [a certain interpretation] as simply incorrect? One could at best make it seem that the subsequent remarks believe themselves to hit upon Heraclitus's teaching in the one absolutely correct way. The task is limited to staying closer to the words of Heraclitus' saying" (260). At the conclusion of his exegesis he writes: "Did Heraclitus intend his question in the way we just explicated? Does what is said through this explication stand within the field of his representations? Who can know or say? But perhaps the saying says it independently of Heraclitus' contemporary representational field" (279). Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* Γ.5.1407b16–17; and Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* VII.132.

4. Unless otherwise specified, translations from the Presocratics are by McKirahan, *Philosophy before Socrates*, occasionally modified.

5. For interpretations of Heraclitus's "*logos*," see Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 37–40; Marcovich, *Heraclitus*, 8–9; *HGP*, vol. I, 419–34; Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 97–98; Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 74–76; Curd, "Knowledge and Unity in Heraclitus," 532–35; Wilcox, "Barbarian *Psyche* in Heraclitus," 627–30; and Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 29–49. Heidegger's distinctive interpretation can be found in *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, 97–102, and in "Logos (Heraklit, Fragment 50)" in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 207–29. Waugh gives a postmodern interpretation in "Heraclitus: The Postmodern Presocratic?" 616.

Heraclitus's answer anticipates Plato's allegory of the cave: we are so used to one kind of experience that it blinds us to a more fundamental reality. This is one of the most frequent themes in the fragments, expressed in many ways. Sometimes the distinction between our ordinary view of things and their true nature is illustrated straightforwardly. When Heraclitus remarks that the sun's breadth "is the length of the human foot" (B3) he is speaking of sensible appearances, while his observation that "If there were no sun, as far as concerns the other stars it would be night" (B99) shows how inadequate our initial perception was.[6] This distinction between visible appearances and their imperceptible foundation is the original insight of philosophy, implied by Thales's claim that all is water, that is, the true nature of reality is not what it seems.[7] Heraclitus prefers to conceive it as fire rather than water, and he asks not only about the underlying *material* unity of nature, but also about the ultimate principle *governing* its workings: "Wisdom is one thing, to know the intelligence (γνώμην) by which all things are steered through all things" (B41).[8] Moreover, for Heraclitus it is not only that we fail to perceive true reality, but that even when we do perceive it its nature is so unexpected that we fail to comprehend it: "All that come upon them do not understand such things . . . but they seem to themselves to" (B17). "Divine things escape recognition because of unbelief" (B86). Therefore, "Unless he expects the unexpected (ἔλπηται ἀνέλπιστον), he will not find it" (B18).

What kind of truth is so unexpected that we fail to recognize it even though it is always with us? Not only is reality different from appearances, it is the very opposite of what we would expect: "Eternity," Heraclitus tells us, "is a child playing, playing a game of checkers; the kingdom belongs to a child" (B52). And, "The most beautiful world-order is a pile of things poured out at random" (B124). This is how things normally appear to us. Throughout the world and its history we commonly believe that life is irrational and unfair, whether because it is without divine governance and therefore intrinsically absurd, or because the gods themselves are unfair by our standards: either they are capricious, as in Homer, or else their justice is not our justice, as in the Book of Job. A world in which bad things happen to good people, and good things to bad people, is, at the level of individuality, a world of random events or a game played by an arbitrary child. But if we can see it at the holistic level, we will see it as a world-order rather than random, and a kingdom rather than a child's game. Where *these* fragments speak of the universe as random or irrational, B1 told us that all things come to be in accordance with a rational *logos*, and B41 said that an intelligence steers all things through all things. The double point of view is expressed unambiguously in places: "The finest harmony is composed of things at variance" (B8); "Things taken together (συνάψιες) are . . . consonant and dissonant" (B10). The universe is beautiful or random depending on whether we look at it in its harmonious wholeness or its antagonistic component parts. "To God all things are beautiful and good and just, but humans have supposed some unjust and others just" (B102).[9] God here represents the perspective of the whole, while humans are focused on their partial point of view. The whole is not reducible to the sum of its parts, for although "all things are one" (B50), "that which is wise is set apart from all" (B108).

The double aspect means that Heraclitus is not the relativist that some of the fragments suggest. The impression of relativism derives from observations such as that sea water is palatable and safe for fish but un-

6. Thus Aristotle: "We imagine the sun to be a foot in diameter though we are convinced that it is larger than the inhabited part of the earth" (*De Anima* Γ.3.428b3–4). Cf. Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 77–78: "From Aristotle (see Kahn, *Thought and Art*, n193) we can infer that the phrase 'the sun is a foot wide' was a standard example of deceptive appearance (like 'sticks look bent in water')." This seems to be his point also in quoting the children's riddle: "All we saw and grasped we have left behind, but all we neither saw nor grasped we bring with us" (B56), the answer to which is "lice." For Heraclitus the significance of the riddle would be that, like the lice, the reality that we now see will be left behind when we see the *logos*, while the unseen reality—the nature that loves to hide—is always with us. Also see Rethy, "Heraclitus, Fragment 56," 1–7).

7. Julius Moravcsik reminds us that this insight was already present in another way in religious thinking. See Moravcsik, "Appearance and Reality in Heraclitus' Philosophy," 551–54.

8. McKirahan, after Kirk, has "Wisdom is one thing, to be skilled in true judgment, how all things are steered through all things." See Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 286–91; but also Gregory Vlastos's reply to Kirk in "On Heraclitus," 352–53. For other discussions see Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 170–72, and Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 107–8.

9. Exactly how verbatim Porphyry's quotation is in B102 is a matter of debate. Kahn suggests that the wording "is that of some anonymous Homeric commentator, perhaps a Stoic, and we cannot know how well it reflects what Heraclitus said." See Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 183, but cf. T. M. Robinson: "Most modern commentators see no reason for not accepting it as fairly exact." See Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 149. In any case, the same basic point is evident in other fragments as well: B1 tells us that all things happen in accordance with the *logos*; B41 says that all things are steered through all things by an intelligence; B4, B9, and B61 point out that things that are bad to us are good to other forms of life; B67 identifies God with night, winter, war, and hunger, as well as with day, summer, peace, and satiety; and B106 rebukes Hesiod for considering some days good and others bad (although the authenticity of this fragment has been questioned).

drinkable and destructive to us (B61), asses prefer garbage to gold (B9), and oxen enjoy eating bitter plants (B4). By showing how our conception of what is good and bad is not necessarily shared by other species, Heraclitus shows that "good" and "bad" reflect not properties of the things themselves, but only how things match up with our particular appetites and needs. In this context, "Dogs bark at everyone they do not know" (B97) suggests that the reason we think some things are better than others is merely a matter of unfamiliarity and prejudice. More generally, the famous remark, "The road up and the road down are one and the same" (B60), suggests that what looks one way from one point of view looks exactly the opposite from a different point of view.[10] And the words, "Hesiod considers some days good and others bad, not understanding that the nature of every day is one and the same" (B106),[11] imply that nothing is in itself any better than anything else. Nevertheless, for Heraclitus there is also an absolute point of view: "Human nature has no insight, but divine nature has it" (B78), and "The wise is one alone; it is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus" (B32). The references to Zeus and the divine need not refer to an external deity, but to the divine within us, as when Aristotle writes: "But such a life would be too high for man; for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him."[12] The difference between the relative and the absolute is the difference between the perspectives of each of the individual parts and that of the whole. Since our values are normally based on particular appetites, needs, and self interest generally: "It is not better for humans to get all they want" (B110).

The fragments indicate this double aspect in various ways, sometimes literally but also through metaphor and paradox. B84a, "Changing, it is at rest," presents a paradox that challenges us to think the difference between the ever-changing parts and the unchanging nature of the whole. Heraclitus's most common metaphor is sleeping and waking. B89 tells us: "For the waking there is one common world, but when asleep each person turns away to a private one." Even in our waking world, however, we are asleep in a metaphorical sense: "people fail to notice (λανθάνει)

10. For a discussion of the identity of opposites in Heraclitus see *HGP*, vol. I, 445–46.

11. My translation. McKirahan does not consider it authentic.

12. *Nicomachean Ethics* K.7.1177b26–27, revised Oxford translation. For the suggestion that Heraclitus is referring to the divine within us in these passages I am indebted to Enrique Hülsz.

what they do when awake, just as they forget (ἐπιλανθάνονται) what they do while asleep" (B1). In that case there is a second sense in which we need to wake up even after we are awake in the normal sense, a second sense in which we need to go from our private worlds to a common one. In the first we go from our individual dream world to our shared waking world, in the second we go from our divisive individual interests to a recognition of what is common to us all. This idea of the common (ξυνός) is introduced in B2 where it is identified with the *logos* and contrasted with individuality[13] The situation is analogous to the subordination of individuals to the law, Heraclitus says in B114: "Those who speak with understanding must rely firmly on what is common to all, as a city relies on its

13. Cf. "What we see when awake is death, what we see asleep is sleep" (B21). To be asleep is to see nothing of the world but only sleep itself, and even when we are awake we see only the mortal world of things that are constantly passing away. But as B1 and B2 show, there is one further step: Beyond the sleep that we see when asleep, and the death or transience we see when awake, there is also something eternal that we can awaken to in another sense. The same analogy appears again in B26: "A person in the night kindles (ἅπτεται) a light for himself when his sight is extinguished. While living, he approximates to (ἅπτεται) a dead man during sleep; while awake, he approximates to (ἅπτεται) one who sleeps." (The translation of the second sentence is Freeman's in *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers*, 26.) The point of the second sentence is similar to what we have just seen: not only do we resemble someone dead when we are asleep, but when we are awake we normally resemble someone asleep. The first sentence implies this through a different metaphor: Just as we kindle a light for ourselves in the literal darkness of night, we need to kindle a different kind of light for ourselves in the metaphorical darkness of our waking life. Heraclitus often uses word play to establish connections, as in B1 (λανθάνει, ἐπιλανθάνονται), B5 (μαινόμενοι, μαίεσθαι), B25 (μόροι, μοίρας), B45 (λόγος [in two senses]), B48 (βίος, βιός), and B114 (ξὺν νόῳ, ξυνῷ). In this case the term ἅπτεται, which originally means to touch, is used in the extended senses of to kindle (touch fire to fuel) and approximate. Taking ἅπτεται more literally, as "touch," gives no clear sense of the whole, even by the standards of "Heraclitus the Obscure." Thus Heidegger, who interprets ἅπτεται in the literal sense of "touch," confesses: "Everything that follows ἑαυτῷ [i.e. everything after the words, "A person in the night kindles a light for himself"] is puzzling to me. I do not see the thrust of the fragment." See *Heraclitus Seminar*, 131; Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 215, calls it "a thicket of riddles"; and Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 93, agrees that it "is one of the most puzzling of the fragments." John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (4th edition; London: Macmillan, 1930), 152, translates quite differently: "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" (Burnet fragment (77) = DK 12B21). Also see *Heraclitus Seminar*, 127–31, and Gadamer, "Heraclitus Studies," in *The Beginning of Knowledge*, 74–77. A similar point is implied when B15 says, "Hades and Dionysus are the same," if Martha Nussbaum is right to identify Dionysus with self-indulgence. Nussbaum, "ΨΥΧΗ in Heraclitus, II," 159. In that case we can take it to mean that a life devoted to our individual appetites, instead of what is common to all, is a kind of living death. For other appearances of the sleeping/waking metaphor see fragments DK 22B73, 75, 88, and 89.

law, and much more firmly. For all human laws are nourished by one law, the divine law; for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over."[14] Just as we subordinate our private wills to laws that are common to all members of our society but different from those of other societies, the diverse laws of all societies are themselves subordinate to one that is common to all, and which they all partially reflect. The two levels of law (human and divine) correspond to the two levels of waking (biological and intellectual), as well as to the perspective of the parts and the whole.

In addition to paradox and metaphor Heraclitus sometimes characterizes the whole-part relationship literally, as in B10's general description: "Things taken together are whole and not whole, brought together and brought apart, consonant and dissonant; out of all things comes a unity, and out of a unity all things." Other literal characterizations are more narrowly focused. B30 for example, focuses on the material aspect of the whole and parts: "The cosmos, the same for all . . . [is] an ever-living fire being kindled in measures and being extinguished in measures": individuals come and go, are kindled and extinguished, but the whole endures forever.[15] And sometimes his literal descriptions are in terms of the governing principle, the *logos*: "it is necessary to follow what is common to all. But although the *logos* is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding" (B2)—we live as if our partial point of view were valid, instead of pursuing that of the common whole. Heraclitus's project is to lead us from our relativistic partial view to one that is universal or common. Our appetites and ambitions reflect our distinctness from each other and drive us into competition: our successes are measured against others' failures and vice versa. But rationality is different. Our thinking not only does not prevent others from enjoying the same understanding, it can even help them to do so through example and instruction. Thus "[t]hinking is common to all" (B113) not only in

14. There is a word play between ξὺν νόῳ ("with understanding") and ξυνῷ ("common to all").

15. The kindling and extinction of individuals and the kindling and extinction of fire are inversely related: "All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things" (B90); "fire will advance and judge and convict all things" (B66). I agree with Guthrie that the phrase "ever-living" implies a continual exchange at the level of parts rather than a periodic conflagration of the whole in which the world is destroyed (see *HGP*, vol. I, 455; cf. 458). Also see Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 315–24; Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 134–38, and Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 96–97.

the trivial sense that all humans think, which after all is equally true of appetite and ambition, but in the distinctive sense that rational thinking abstracts from our partial viewpoint and aims at something that is impersonally true and therefore available to us all.[16] It is in this same sense that Heraclitus says the world-order or cosmos is the same for all (see B30). Heraclitus is a relativist at the level of the individual, the culture, and the species: what I call good, what my city calls good, and even what all human beings call good, is also bad if other individuals or cities or species find it so. But he is not *ultimately* a relativist because there is a perspective other than those of the individual, city, and species, namely that of the whole, common to all, which Heraclitus calls the *logos*.

II

Fragment B18 says, "Unless he expects the unexpected, he will not find it, since it is not to be hunted out and is inaccessible (ἄπορος)." If it is not to be hunted out and is inaccessible, how can we pursue it? There is no direct path from empirical knowledge to wisdom because, in Heraclitus's metaphor, wisdom is like waking up, and the transition from empirical knowledge to wisdom, like that from sleep to wakefulness, is not merely incremental but abrupt. Heraclitus's pedagogical strategy cannot therefore merely give us information and doctrines. It must give us a different way of seeing the world. That is one reason for the paradoxical formulations that short-circuit our ordinary ways of thinking. It is also the reason he says, "Listening not to me but to the *logos* it is wise to agree that all things are one" (B50). Listening to Heraclitus means looking for truth in words and treating what he says as one teaching among others. Listening to the *logos*, on the other hand, means trying to understand the truth that his words point to but can never completely embody. "Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears" (B101a), means more than that sight is our dominant sense. It means that, although the words we *hear* can give an indication of wisdom, they can never directly impart it the way they impart information; only experiencing truth with our own (doubly awake)

16. B113 has been interpreted in widely different ways: from Kirk's dismissal of it as a paraphrase of B2 (Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 55–56, 63), to Kahn's interpretation of it as panpsychism, to Schindler's proposal to take it as meaning "I cannot think by myself alone." Schindler, "The Community of the One and the Many," 425.

eyes can do that.[17] Thus, "The wise is one alone; it is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus" (B32). It is unwilling to be called by any name, even the highest, because it is beyond naming; but as long as that limitation is appreciated, we may name it as best we can, since only by words can it be communicated at all. Heraclitus resists dogmatism on the one hand, but also skepticism on the other. Just as the oracle of Apollo "neither speaks nor conceals, but gives a sign" (B93), Heraclitus tries to communicate to us in the only way possible something that cannot adequately be put into words.

In Plato's *Cratylus* Socrates remarks, "Heraclitus says somewhere that everything flows and nothing remains still, and comparing things to the current of a river, he says that you can't step twice into the same river" (*Cratylus* 402a = A6).[18] Heraclitus does not, however, go as far as Cratylus who, according to Aristotle, "finally thought that nothing should be spoken but only moved his finger [pointed at things], and who criticized even Heraclitus for saying that one cannot step into the same river twice, for he himself thought that one could not do so even once."[19] If flux and individuality are all there is to the world, then speech, which uses words with fixed meanings and universal application, is always a misrepresentation. In that case, Cratylus believes, we must indicate our meaning not by speaking with our mouth but by pointing with our finger. We can

17. Cf. Nietzsche, "Must one first smash their ears so that they learn to hear with their eyes?" (*Also sprach Zarathustra*, Zarathustras Vorrede §5).

18. The metaphor occurs also in B12, B49a, and B91. Whether these were originally independent statements, or whether one or more is a paraphrase or misquotation of the other(s), is a matter of dispute. The same idea seems implied by B21: "What we see when awake is death," i.e. everything is always passing away. Even "[t]he sun is new each day" (6)—although others take this to be a more literal scientific claim. See Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 79, and Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 265–79. Some readers doubt that the flux doctrine was meant to apply universally. Kirk, for example, writes that Heraclitus "believed strongly in the value of sense-perception, providing that it is interpreted intelligently. . . . Our observation tells us that this table or that rock are *not* changing at every instant" (Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 376). But observation told the atomists and other Presocratics that rock and other solids did slowly erode. Aristotle says (before refuting it), "the view is actually held by some that not merely some things but all things in the world are in motion and always in motion, though we cannot apprehend the fact by sense-perception. . . . The theory resembles that about the stone being worn away by the drop of water or split by plants growing out of it" (*Physics* Θ.3.253b10–15). As Guthrie writes in response to Kirk, "That the rock is changing every instant we cannot see with our eyes, but it is what their evidence suggests if we apply 'minds that understand the language'. . . . The continuous imperceptible change is a natural inference from the observation" (*HGP*, vol. I, 451).

19. *Metaphysics* Γ.5.1010a12–15.

imagine that a disciple of Cratylus, who similarly tried to be more rigorous than his own teacher, might criticize Cratylus for thinking one could even point at anything, since the thing pointed at would already be different by the time he raised his finger. Heraclitus is not blind to Cratylus's point, but he recognizes that it is only half true: "We step into and we do not step into the same rivers. We are and we are not" (B49a). Heraclitus's paradoxical formulations challenge us to see beyond the words without altogether dispensing with them.

If Heraclitus cannot give us this wisdom but only hint at it, what *we* can do is seek it both within ourselves and in our relation to the external world. The first is suggested by his words, "I searched myself out" (B101). Since "all things come to be in accordance with this *logos*" (B1), it is operative in each of us and discoverable within us. It is always with us whether we notice it or not, for "How can one hide from what never sets?" (B16). Thus, "It belongs to all people to know themselves and to think rightly" (B116). For Heraclitus the self is a microcosm of reality as a whole, so we can discover within ourselves the nature that also encompasses us, that is, the *logos*.[20] "The soul has a *logos* that increases itself" (B115) means that the discovery within ourselves of the principle by which all things are governed is the beginning of wisdom, a beginning which is self-increasing once we become attentive to it. That is why "[y]ou would not discover the limits of the soul although you travelled every road: it has so deep a *logos*" (B45).[21] When Heraclitus said, "Listening not to me but to the *logos* it is wise to agree that all things are one" (B50), the word he chose for "agree" is *homologein*, which echoes microcosmically the reference to the *logos*.

As with Plato's subsequent doctrine of recollection, what is called for is not simply introspection but also a sensitivity to the way that the empirical world points to something beyond itself, something that is accessible through our thinking rather than our senses. In B23 Heraclitus writes, "They would not have known the name of justice if these things did not exist," that is, it would never have occurred to us to conceive of justice if it were not for the kind of social interactions that make us aware of the possibilities of exploitation and redress that imply an underlying sense of rightness. Since we must examine the particulars of reality in

20. Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 67–69, 90–96, is especially alert to the microcosm-macrocosm theme.

21. Here *logos* has the double meaning of measure and the principle of the universe.

order to become aware of what underlies them, to wake up and see what was always here, empirical investigation is indispensable to the attainment of wisdom: "Men who are lovers of wisdom must be inquirers into many things indeed" (B35).

The importance he attaches to investigation makes him closer to Aristotle than to Plotinus, but he is under no illusion about how few of the details that such investigations require us to learn will actually be useful in our search for wisdom: "Those who seek gold dig up much earth and find little [gold]" (B22). Consequently, "Much learning does not teach insight (νόον)" (B40), and "Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to people if they have barbarian souls" (B107), that is, if they do not understand the language.[22] It is not the empirical details themselves that are of interest, but how they point beyond themselves. In B1 Heraclitus said that "people are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each in accordance with its nature (φύσιν) and saying how it is." The words and deeds themselves are not what is important here, but their underlying "nature" (φύσις)—people who regard words and deeds as sufficient in themselves are "like the inexperienced." The *nature* of a thing is a bridge between its uniqueness alongside an infinite number of other unique individuals and the nature of the whole in which all individuals are united and reconciled. For all his emphasis on flux and uniqueness, Heraclitus has no hesitation in making generalizations about fixed species or natures such as oxen (B4) asses (B9), pigs (B13, B37), birds (B37), dogs (B97), and of course human beings (B78 and *passim*). For Heraclitus, unlike his disciple Cratylus and others, the common natures of things count for more than their uniqueness.[23]

The tension between unique individuals and their common natures plays itself out in Heraclitus's frequent references to the way opposites are

22. "*Barbaros*" means someone who does not speak Greek. Also see Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 106–7, and Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 80. Joel Wilcox argues for taking "*barbaros*" in its more colloquial sense of "foreigner": "Eyes and ears are bad witnesses for those whose *psychai* are foreign to the *logos*." See Wilcox, "Barbarian *Psyche*," 633. Nussbaum, "ΨΥΧΗ in Heraclitus, I," 9–12, takes it to refer to linguistic incompetence more generally.

23. And so do their material elements. The material basis of all things is the mixture in different proportions of the same four elements, fire, water, earth, and air (B76a). So all things, no matter how diverse, are not only to be understood in terms of common species but also in terms of the four elements common to all things. The goal of wisdom is not to simply to become acquainted with the multitude of individual things themselves, but with what lies behind them, that "by which all things are steered through all things" (B41).

united within a common cycle. "The same thing is both living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old; for these things transformed are those, and those transformed back again are these" (B88). They are the same because they are poles of single processes: the process of aging, the cycle of life and death,[24] and the cycle of waking and sleep. In other fragments he calls attention to similar circles or cycles of day and night (B57), up and down (B60), cold and hot, and dry and wet (B126). In one place, he makes this concept of a circle explicit and connects it with the idea of the common: "The beginning and the end are common on the circumference of a circle" (B103). However much things are manifestations of change, they are also manifestations of constant patterns or cycles. These patterns, in turn, are themselves manifestations of the first principle of all things: "*God* is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger, but changes the way <fire,> when mingled with perfumes, is named according to the scent of each" (B67).[25] Not only are day and night and the others the same insofar as they are poles of the same cycles, but the cycles are themselves manifestations of God. The ultimate nature of things is in itself the unchanging unity of all oppositions, and changes only in its manifestations, just as a river is itself an enduring entity despite its internal flow.

The perfumes in the analogy, which, when mixed with fire, give their name to it, seem to be a metaphor for the moments of time. All finite things exist at their appropriate time, after which they are replaced by others.[26] Thus Heraclitus speaks of "the seasonable times (ὥρας) which

24. The idea of the same things being transformed not only from life to death but also from death back to life, and not only from young to old but also from old back to young, is often taken to be a reference to reincarnation, which it may be. But it may also be a reference to the material elements that alternate between living and dead bodies, and in the same way between old and young ones.

25. Emphasis added. "Fire" is McKirahan's insertion based on Diels's conjecture. Oil, air, water, and wine have been other proposals. "Fire" has the advantage of alluding to Heraclitus' conception of fire as the elemental universe as a whole (B69), but the point is the same any of the conjectures.

26. Some fifty years earlier Anaximander had written: "The things that are perish . . . according to necessity, for they pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice in accordance with the ordering of time" (DK 12B1). Taking the perfumes to refer to moments in time is not open to the objection Kahn raises against interpreting the metaphor as fire and incense, namely that, unlike the whole and its parts, "the altar flame is of course distinct from the incense or spices that are thrown upon it." See Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 280, who offers an alternative reading of the fragment.

bring everything" (B100),[27] and says, "The sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise, the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find him out" (B94). Accordingly, when Heraclitus compares God to fire that is named according to the incense being burned in it, the point is that we name the unnamable whole according to its present condition (day or night, winter or summer, war or peace, satiety or hunger). God in itself is unchanging and timeless, but seen at particular times appears as one state or another. At rest, it is changing.

What B67 said about cycles, B62 says about individuals: "Immortal mortals, mortal immortals, living the death of the others and dying their life" (B62). Heraclitus's God is immortal because beyond change and time; but because all things are God, God also coincides with what is mortal, changing, and temporal. If we think away time, all things disappear into God, while if we look at things temporally, God disappears into all things, like Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturans* (God) and *natura naturata* (the natural world). Each lives the death of the others and dies their life: "out of all things comes a unity, and out of a unity all things" (B10). Thus Heraclitus can say both that "all things are one" (B50) and also that "that which is wise is set apart from all" (B108). It is set apart not as an exception to the oneness of all things, but as the atemporal oneness of all that is temporal.

III

If all is one, and all personal values are arbitrary, and the most beautiful order is a pile of things poured out at random, what is the point of moral effort? Whatever we do, it is all one and the same, a temporal manifestation of God, so why not take the path of least resistance and do whatever we feel like? If all things happen in accordance with the *logos* (B1), and all things are steered through all things by an intelligence (B41), and to God all things are beautiful, good, and just (B102), and every day is as good as every other day (B106), then it seems that everything we do is equally good and our moral choices are effectively meaningless. This is not the conclusion that Heraclitus draws, but we need to understand how he can avoid it.

27. A different kind of interpretation has been suggested by Reinhardt, "Heraclitea," 228–35. Also see Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 294–305, and Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 155–56.

His description of wisdom as "to know the intelligence by which all things are steered through all things" (B41), and of the *logos* as that by which all things come to be (B1), suggests that there is in fact some rationale for the way things happen, and several fragments testify to the importance of achieving and living in accordance with this wisdom. Thus, "Right thinking (σωφρονεῖν) is the greatest virtue, and wisdom is to speak the truth and act in accordance with nature" (B112). Conversely, "Justice will convict those who fabricate falsehoods and bear witness to them" (B28). How then could Heraclitus believe that to God all things are beautiful and good and just? He seems to contradict that statement explicitly when he says that "most people are bad, and few are good" (B104).[28] This is one of the central paradoxes of Heraclitus's thought. On the one hand, from the point of view of the whole all things are good, all are constituent parts of a divine harmony. On the other hand, Heraclitus continually urges us to live a certain kind of life and has no patience with those who do not see things as he does. He said that "Homer deserved to be expelled from the contests and flogged, and Archilochus likewise" (B42), and elsewhere he speaks abusively not only of Homer (B56), but also of Hesiod (B40, B57), Pythagoras (B40, B129), Xenophanes (B40), and Hecataeus (B40), as well as people in general (B29, B70, B104, B121).

In order to see how he can say that all is good, on the one hand, and that most people are bad, on the other hand, we have to understand his conception of our distinctive human potential—our rational mind. We saw earlier that thinking, unlike our appetites, enables us to rise above our partial point of view and discover the impartial perspective that is common to all things (B113). To the extent that our thinking succeeds in rising above partiality, we awaken to the *logos* that is common to all (B2) and thus within ourselves (B45, B115), and in accordance with which all things come to be (B1). To be a good person in Heraclitus's sense is to achieve this awakening. There are two aspects to our nature, then, corresponding to the difference between the divine and human natures mentioned in B78: On the one hand, our rational common nature that can rise above particularity and grasp the eternal, and on the other hand, our unique individuality that is wedded to ever-changing particularity. Insofar as our individual nature is part of a whole that is thoroughly good our

28. B133 says similarly, "Bad people are adversaries of true ones," but is not considered authentic.

individuality contributes to the greater good no matter what we do, and in that sense all things and all people are good. Even the divisive actions of a selfish person contribute to an overall good, the way "[t]he path of writing is straight and crooked" (B59)[29]—that is, however much the individual elements may zig and zag, they contribute to the overall movement forward. Similarly, "A person's character is his divinity" (B119)[30] means that each of us in our own way, regardless of what kind of character we have, manifests the divine nature. Thus Heraclitus says of people who are still asleep to what is common, "Sleepers are co-workers in what goes on in the world" (B75). These are people who contribute to the good of the whole despite themselves, who are good not in themselves but only because their actions have beneficial ramifications that they neither foresee nor intend. But those who live rationally, by the thinking that is common to all, contribute to goodness not only indirectly and unknowingly like the others, but also directly and knowingly by embodying within themselves and within their lives the rational principle of the whole. Everyone is good in a merely natural sense, as part of the goodness of the natural world, but we are good in the moral sense, and our life is intrinsically meaningful, only to the extent that our thinking has awakened from the partial to the common, and our mind identifies itself with the whole rather than with the part that is our individual body.

But how can selfish, brutal, and destructive actions possibly be necessary for the goodness of the whole? Does such a view not trivialize human suffering? Heraclitus is not unaware of the paradoxical nature of this view, and in fact he insists on it: "They do not understand how, though at variance with itself, it agrees with itself. It is a backwards turning harmony like that of the bow and the lyre" (B51). Just as a bow and lyre reconcile within themselves the inward pull of the string with the outward pull of the frame, the world as a whole reconciles within itself the disparate tendencies of each of its parts to go their own way in opposition to each other. That was what he meant by saying, "The most beautiful world-order is a pile of things poured out at random" (B124). At the

29. An alternate reading, "The path of carding wheels is straight and crooked," is defended by Kirk, Marcovich, and Kahn, although the present reading is defended also by Guthrie and Robinson. On either reading the point is the same.

30. The word translated as "divinity" is δαίμων, as in B79: "A man is called infantile by a divinity (δαίμονος) as a child is by a man."

level of individuals everything is arbitrary and random, but that same totality seen as a whole constitutes an order and harmony.[31] That is not apparent to us normally, but "[a]n unapparent harmony is stronger than an apparent one" (B54). In other words, things which at the level of individuals are destructive and divisive constitute at the level of the whole a cosmic harmony.

As "harmony" is the word for the way all things are related to one another at the level of the whole, the word for the way they are related to one another at the level of individuals is "strife": "What is opposed brings together; the finest harmony is composed of things at variance, and everything comes to be in accordance with strife" (B8). Heraclitus not only does not trivialize individual suffering, he insists on it: "Homer was wrong to say 'Would that strife might perish from among gods and men.' For if that were to occur, all things would cease to exist" (fragment 43 [Bywater]).[32] Thus, "War is the father of all and king of all, and some he shows as gods, others as humans; some he makes slaves, others free" (B53). The strife that carves our individuality out of the whole reveals the distinctive character that is our divinity.

Two of the terms that Heraclitus used to characterize the harmony of the whole were "justice" and "common." Now he says, "It is necessary to know that war is common and justice is strife, and that all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity" (B80). To say that war is common is to say that what divides us also unites us, and to say that justice is strife is to say that what unites us also divides us. Finally, to say that all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity is to say that the strife that divides us is a necessary feature of the reality as a whole that we share in common. This view is not as counterintuitive as it may seem.[33] Not only do we find it in Darwin's conception of evolution through warlike competition, but our own experience teaches that without challenge our society, and we ourselves, are likely to become complacent and stagnant, our vitality replaced with unreflective conventions

31. Cf. B8 ("the finest harmony is composed of things at variance") and B10 ("Things taken together are . . . consonant and dissonant").

32. Not considered a direct quotation by Diels-Kranz (or McKirahan), but counted as such by Bywater (see Burnet, 132 §65). My translation.

33. It is an example of the dialectical view of the world found in philosophers like Plato, Hegel, and Marx.

and habits, and the harmonious tension of opposition replaced by the repression of one side by another. Heraclitus's metaphors remind us several times that violence is sometimes necessary to benefit us: "Every animal is driven to pasture by blows" (B11),[34] people do not appreciate the benefit they receive from being cut and burned by doctors (see B58), and "Even the barley drink separates if it is not stirred up" (B125). There would be no reason for us to rise above the simplest and most elementary modes of thinking about the world and about ourselves if we were never challenged by obstacles—whether the obstacles to our understanding that provoke us to wonder and to reflective thought, or the obstacles to our will that provoke us to rethink our values and our way of doing things. Thus, "Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest" (B111). Without deprivations like disease we would never have become conscious of benefits like health.[35] It is the point he made also in B23: "They would not have known the name of justice if these things [injustices] did not exist." It is not hard for us to appreciate that, without the selfish and divisive behavior of Paris and Helen, the greatness and beauty of the *Iliad* could not exist, or the greatness and beauty of the *Odyssey* without the enmity and challenges that continually test Odysseus. It is more difficult to appreciate in life than in art that without the divisive behavior of individuals the harmoniousness of the whole could not exist, but the underlying principle is the same.

34. Fink, *Heraclitus Seminar*, 32, compares the 9th stanza of Hölderlin's poem "Stimme des Volks" ("Voice of the People"): Und, nicht des Adlers Jungen allein, sie wirft / Der Vater aus dem Neste, damit sie nicht / Zu lang ihm bleiben, uns auch treibt mit / Richtigem Stachel hinaus der Herrscher. [Not only with the eagle's children / Does the father throw them from the nest / Lest they stay too long with him, we too / are driven by the just goad of the ruler.] (My translation)

A similar interpretation can be given to B64. "Thunderbolt steers all things" can be taken metaphorically to mean that violence is essential to the ordering of things. It is, however, one the most variously interpreted of all Heraclitus's fragments. Kirk, *Heraclitus*, 356, interprets the thunderbolt as a reference to elemental fire. Marcovich, *Heraclitus*, 424–25, Kahn, *Thought and Art*, 271, and Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 126, take it to refer to the celestial fire or divine *aethēr*, Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, 127, to Zeus's thunderbolt, while Fink interprets it as the lightning flash that "brings to light the multiple things in their articulated gathering" (*Heraclitus Seminar*, 5 and *passim*). Also see Kirk's, *Heraclitus*, 354–57, survey of other interpretations.

35. The point is even stronger if we read κακὸν ἀγαθόν for καὶ ἀγαθόν, as proposed by Heitz and accepted by Diels and others. In that case it would read, "Disease makes health pleasant, evil [makes] good [pleasant], hunger satiety, weariness rest." But it is better not to emend the text unnecessarily.

However paradoxical, there is nothing unreasonable in Heraclitus's claim that the world may at once be good in itself and distressing in its parts. To be awake in Heraclitus's sense means to hold onto this double point of view, which is our own simultaneous harmony and strife.[36] The viewpoint of awakened thinking tells us that the whole is good, and therefore all things taken together are beautiful, just, and good. The practical viewpoint tells us that along this way lie apathy and paralysis of the will. It tells us that some things are better than others, and that we have the responsibility to try to bring about goodness in the world and oppose evil. Heraclitus's philosophy teaches us that we must ultimately recognize not only the harmony of the whole that unifies the strife among the parts, but also the harmony that unifies the strife *between* these two viewpoints, that of the whole and that of the part. According to the first, we must strive to wake up to the understanding that our own place and our own set of values are one among many, all subordinated to the whole. According to the second, we must hold on to the recognition that even if our mind can rise to a god-like perspective of the whole, we are at the same time parts within that whole. We are not an impersonal god, but finite persons with our own part to play within the whole.[37] We must do what we think is right, even though others think differently, but we must at the same time recognize that those who disagree with us and oppose us have their own part to play.

We can see this at the level of the city as well as at the level of the individual. Heraclitus recognized the relativity of each city's laws when he said that "all human laws are nourished by one law, the divine law; for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over" (B114). But he also recognized that it is the responsibility of the city to play its part in the world by championing its own laws: "The populace must fight for the law as for the city wall" (B44). What is true of the populace and its law is true of individuals and their principles: we must fight for what we believe in. But at the same time we must also keep in mind

36. Also see Eugen Fink: "a relatedness is articulated between πάντα [all], in the sense of many in entirety, and the one, and a relatedness of the one to the many in entirety" (*Heraclitus Seminar*, 21).

37. Also see Nussbaum, "ΨΥΧΗ in Heraclitus, II," 165: "Ethical judgments are relative, but they must be made; and the recognition of the relative nature of our ethical terms should not trick us into believing they are meaningless."

that the words of Bilo also apply to us: "It is not better for humans to get all they want"; and that the tension of antagonism and strife is the other side of harmony. This is not a relativism. The awakened perspective that sees the limitations of any finite point of view and aims at the unification of harmony, is always superior to the personal point of view that sees only its own advantage and pursues the divisiveness of competition. The personal point of view is not equally good or equally fulfilling where it does not coincide with the transpersonal view. Selfish behavior is not as good as enlightened behavior. But it is equally necessary.