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Recovering Heraclitus: Neglected Religious, Ethical And Political Themes In The Work Of A Pre-Socratic Thinker

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RECOVERING HERACLITUS: NEGLECTED RELIGIOUS, ETHICAL, AND POLITICAL THEMES IN THE WORK OF A PRE-SOCRATIC THINKER

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DEDICATION

For my parents who inexplicably think I am smarter than I am.

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INTRODUCTION

In his life of Socrates, Diogenes Laertius recounts that Euripides once gave Socrates a copy of Heraclitus' *Peri Physeos*. When asked his opinion of it, the "gadfly" of Athens replied, "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."[1] This is, I think, an excellent metaphor for the experience of reading the fragmentary remains of Heraclitus' work. Some of it appears clear and clever, while some requires greater effort to understand. My goal in this essay is to persuade the reader that the best way to take this "dive" is to do so with the proper equipment; the elements of which can be found in Heraclitus' historical context. This context helps us discover, I believe, that beneath the obscurity we can see in Heraclitus early attempts at religious, political, and ethical philosophy alongside the metaphysical and natural speculations for which he is more famous.

That fame is mostly due the many fragments that say things like DK12: **It is always different waters that flow toward those who step into the same rivers**, DK49a **We step and do not step into the same rivers, we are and we are not**, and DK31A: **Turnings of fire: first sea; then half of the sea, earth; and the other half, lightning storm** (*prester*)." [2] Much ink can, and has been spilled on fragments like these and thus I will not be considering them in this essay. Their omission is not an indication I wish to dispute their metaphysical or naturalistic importance. Rather I wish to examine fragments which I believe have been given less attention and thus could benefit most from the method I will use herein.

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[1] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume I, Books 1-5*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge/Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1925), 153 (II.22). Delos is an island in the Cyclades reputed to be the birthplace of Apollo and Artemis.

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, references to Heraclitus fragments will follow the numbering found in Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1903). and will be of the format "DK48." Almost all English translations will be from Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III: Early Ionian Thinkers, Part 2*, trans. André Laks and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016). I have also kept the formatting of their text the same. They usually indicate by bold text that the fragment is a direct quote. Where they think the Greek version of the word needs to be included, they Romanize it and place it in regular parentheses, i.e (*prester*) above. Throughout this essay, I will be keeping that as well. Any editorialization by me will be indicated in the usual fashion in block brackets like so [*nomos*]. Hopefully, this is not too confusing for the reader.

That method is to foreground what historical information we can muster about Heraclitus' life and the world he lived in to help us interpret his thinking. Thus the goal of Chapter 1 will be fourfold. First, I will introduce the problem of Heraclitean obscurity, the approach of past commenters and promote the need for historical contextualization to solve this problem. Second, I will defend this project against possible objections that either it is unnecessary or impossible due to the supposed lack of credibility of our sources. Third, I will provide a brief biography of Heraclitus and a history of his hometown Ephesus which I will rely on in later chapters. Finally, I will give a summary of my overall argument that historical contextualization is interpretively fruitful.

Chapter 2 acts as set-up for Chapter 3's discussion of Heraclitus on religion. This chapter consists of an extended discussion of other approaches of interpreting Heraclitus on religion and an examination of their strengths and weaknesses. It ends with my own view that Heraclitus was positively influenced by certain religious practices he would have encountered during his lifetime.

Chapter 3 will be the "first fruits", so to speak, that I believe my approach can offer: Heraclitus on Religion. First, I provide an examination of the influence exerted by the Eleusinian Mysteries on Plato and (I argue) Heraclitus. Second, I examine how Heraclitus' oracular style and his basic ethical ideas trace to the worship of Apollo at Delphi.

Chapter 4 moves to the political realm to examine fragments about conflict (*polemos/eris*), law (*nomos*), and justice (*dike*). In the first section I argue for an understanding of the Heraclitean notion of "conflict" as both the *opposition* between things, but also the *interdependence* of those opposed things. In the second section I explore Heraclitus' understanding of law (*nomos*) and justice (*dike*) considering the prevalent understanding of those terms during his period. In the closing section I briefly examine the question of how to characterize Heraclitus ideologically on the spectrum between oligarchs and democrats.

In chapter 5 I begin with a summary of what I take to be Heraclitus' ethical/political views given all I have discussed in previous chapter. The concluding section of this essay traces the influence of Heraclitean ideas on the ethical and political philosophy of later thinkers stretching from Democritus to the Stoics as evidence that ancient thinkers appreciated the ethical side of Heraclitus to a greater degree than might be supposed.

CHAPTER 1: HERACLITUS IN CONTEXT

In this chapter, I will introduce the historical elements of my project and explain their relevance to interpreting Heraclitus and I will defend my methodological approach. That approach involves the use of historical, political, and religious context to illuminate Heraclitus' work. In section I, I will examine the difficulty of interpreting Heraclitus and the traditional view that he is exclusively a natural philosopher or metaphysician who claims that "everything changes." In section II, I will consider potential objections to my project of using historical context to gain insight into Heraclitus as philosopher of religion and ethics/politics. My response will include an explanation of why a work called *Peri Physeos* (lit. "on nature.") might have passages about religion, ethics and politics. In addition, I will also examine the objection that we either have too little historical material or our sources are too unreliable to be of any serious use in interpreting Heraclitus. That done, in section III I will set down what I take to be the relevant historical and biographical details that will guide my analysis in the rest of the essay. Following that, I will end this chapter with Section IV's summary of my argument.

I. Interpreting Heraclitus

In this section, I will examine the interpretive difficulties associated with Heraclitus' work, his traditional reception as only a natural philosopher or a metaphysician and have a brief look at the work of Charles Kahn and Roman Dilcher who separately have tried to recover a Heraclitus that does not fit so neatly within the traditional mold.

A. Heraclitus the Obscure

Interpreters of Heraclitus hitherto have faced two main difficulties. The most obvious difficulty is the infamous "obscurity" of Heraclitus' prose.[3] Heraclitus relies on multiple meanings, apparent paradox, and other strange methods that can veil the point he is making. He delights in

[3] A problem I will return to in Chapter 4 of this essay.

puns and double meanings such as we find in DK48: βιός τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα βίος ἔργον δὲ θάνατος (**The name of the bow** [*bios*] **is life** [*bios*], **but its work is death**.) This can make some fragments devilishly difficult to interpret plainly in English *or* in Greek.

This obscurity led some ancient writers, according to Diogenes Laertius, to suppose that Heraclitus "deliberately made [his book] more obscure in order that none but adepts should approach it, and lest familiarity should breed contempt."[4] Considering Laertius' hostile attitude toward Heraclitus, I am skeptical of this interpretation. More fruitful is the approach taken by Charles Kahn and other modern interpreters who think that this obscurity and wordplay are meant to draw attention to the doctrine of the "unity of opposites." This Heraclitean doctrine does not hold, as some think, that contradictory qualities are identical, but asserts something like the "interconnectedness of contrary states in life and in the world."[5] The punning and wordplay, the argument goes, are intended to draw attention to that interconnectedness.

Kahn and others have persuasively argued that Heraclitus probably developed this doctrine in response to Anaximander, who is said to have claimed that

> … the principle (*arkhê*) and element of beings is the **unlimited** (*to apeiron*) … And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens, **according to obligation: for they pay the penalty** (*dikê*) **and retribution** (*tisis*) **to each other for their injustice** (*adikia*) according to the order of time.[6]

In other words, Anaximander is suggesting a world where individual things come into existence by limiting or portioning off bits of an unlimited nature.[7] He borrows from the language of legal dispute resolution to suggest the manner in which change occurs to this *apeiron* over time. Kahn argues that the unity of opposites doctrine takes over the basic language and themes from this idea.

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[4] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 413.

[5] Daniel W Graham, "Heraclitus," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N Zalta, Fall 2015, n.d., http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/heraclitus/.

[6] André Laks and Glenn W. Most, trans., *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume II: Beginnings and Early Ionian Thinkers, Part 1* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016), 285. (B1).

[7] I like to imagine an infinite clay sheet with shapes picked out by the impressions made by cookie cutters.

Heraclitus, however, offers an important "correction" in DK80: "One must know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things come about by strife and constraint." Whereas Anaximander suggests that this or that opposing force can gain the upper hand, leading to temporary excess (hence "*adikia*"), Heraclitus claims that "justice" (*dike*) is not merely the redress of an injustice but a name for the entire system of balances between injustices and redresses, crimes and punishments.[8] This is much like the way we refer to the "justice system" when we are referring to this same species of dependent phenomena. This idea is strikingly like the Taoist concept of "Tao" (a.k.a. "Dao") which, according to one commentator, is the

> …constant blending of opposites, the mingling of all things from and into the one thing, constitutes the rhythm of the universe. All things stem from the oneness of the Dao, and exist as a result of the interaction of opposites. The nature of the universe is utter interdependence, because everything exists because of and in relation to everything else.[9]

Usual examples include: without ugliness there is no beauty, without darkness there is no light, without night, no day, etc. Indeed, Heraclitus comes close to making a Daoist-like statement himself in DK23: "**They would not know the name of Justice if these things** [i.e. unjust actions?] **did not exist.**"

Thus far from being a suggestion that contradictory qualities are identical, Heraclitus is suggesting that contradictory qualities are, at the very least *conceptually dependent*. This conceptual dependence is thus taken to be a sign of a unity which underlies the opposing concepts. It is under this interpretive framework that we can best understand fragments like DK61: "**The sea, the purest water and the foulest: for fish it is drinkable and life-giving, but for humans undrinkable and deadly.**" Part of what makes something "sea" is that it be potable for fish and

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[8] Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: A New Arrangement and Translation of the Fragments with Literary and Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 206–7. Here Kahn is relying heavily on Gregory Vlastos, "On Heraclitus," in *Studies in Presocratic Philosophy Volume 1: The Beginnings of Philosophy*, ed. David Furley and Reginald E. Allen (Routledge, 2016).

[9] Steven C. Combs, "The Useless-/Usefulness of Argumentation: The Dao of Disputation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41, no. 2 (September 1, 2004): 60, https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2004.11821619.

non-potable for humans. It would be a mistake to see this *only* as a statement of relativism. The further, more critical point is that there is still a "sea" even though it has these opposed relative qualities. Heraclitus is always seeking a unity or order in oppositions. As he says in DK124: "**Like flesh of things** [*sarma*, lit. sweepings, refuse] **spread out at random, the most beautiful order** (*kosmos*)." Though something may look disordered or excessive, there is an underlying order to it.

These are not the easiest ideas to convey, so Heraclitus makes use of poetic, and cryptic language to indicate what he could not easily express directly. In this, he was greatly influenced by the religious traditions associated with Apollo at Delphi and Demeter at Eleusis which we will discuss in greater detail below. Suffice it to say for now that it is my contention that examining Heraclitus' religious and political background will help illumine his fragments further.

B. The Commentarial Tradition and the Subject Matter of Heraclitus' Book

The next interpretive issue is what the "point," "main idea" or "subject matter" of *Peri Physeos* ("On Nature") might be. We have no complete work but only "fragments" gathered together from citations to and paraphrases of Heraclitus in dozens of works by other authors that span several hundred years. Each new translation of Heraclitus since Diels-Kranz in 1903 seems to be an exercise in re-arranging the fragments by subject matter or theme. The consensus view among ancient and modern commentators assumes that Heraclitus was continuing the work started by the Milesians or perhaps transitioning from their natural philosophical work to the metaphysical interests of the Eleatics. I do not wish to dispute that this was *part* of Heraclitus' project, just that it was the whole, or even necessarily the *primary* aspect, of his project. Indeed, Diogenes Laertius claims that *Peri Physeos* was a "divided into three discourses, one on the universe, another on politics, and a third on theology."[10] Despite this, most of the attention has been focused on the first and (to a much lesser extent) third discourses, with little if anything on the second. This scarcity is strange

[10] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:413.

since there was at least one ancient commentator, Diodotus, who suggested that *Peri Physeos* was a political-ethical treatise that drew on examples from nature.[11] This is a rather extreme claim and quite possibly mistaken, but it at least shows that there was enough recognition of political and ethical content in *Peri Physeos* for this mistake to have occurred.

Many modern commentators are little better in the attention they give to Heraclitus' ethical and political ideas. Kahn and Dilcher are among a minority of such commentators who see Heraclitus as discussing the "human experience."[12] Almost all commentators agree that we can roughly divide Heraclitus' ideas into the following doctrines: (a) the unity of opposites; (b) the *logos* is *xynos,* (c) the supremacy of fire, and (d) flux. Kahn, in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, argues that (b)-(d) are all in the service of revealing the truth of (a), which in turn is a truth about human experience as mortal beings.[13] Kahn is following Diels in asserting that Heraclitus' "central insight" is the "identity of structure between the inner, personal world of the psyche and the larger natural order of the universe."[14] Thus the tension and conflict in the *kosmos*, is mirrored by tension and conflict in the *psyche*. Naturally, Kahn's answer to the first interpretive issue (i.e. obscurity) flows from this view. Put simply, only tension and conflict in language—like ambiguity—can express inner tensions and conflicts.

Dilcher's *Studies in Heraclitus* largely agrees: "[Heraclitus] did not intend to engage in natural philosophy, but rather to explore the condition of human existence."[15] The ambiguity in the text of

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[11] Laertius, 2:423.

[12] More on which will be discussed below. The best may be, Kurt A. Raaflaub, who has recently published an essay on Heraclitus' political ideas. While I agree with many of Raaflaub's points, I disagree on his dismissal of the historical context we have on Heraclitus as irrelevant to interpreting his thought. Kurt A. Raaflaub, "Shared Responsibility for the Common Good: Heraclitus, Early Philosophy, and Political Thought," in *Heraklit Im Kontext*, ed. E. Fantino et al., Studia Praesocratica Series (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Company KG, 2017), 103–28. I will discuss this issue in detail below.

[13] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 20–23.

[14] Kahn, 21.

[15] Roman Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, Spudasmata : Studien Zur Klassischen Philologie Und Ihren Grenzgebieten (Olms, 1995), 9.

Peri Physeos is employed for a "dialectical process of understanding."[16] Dilcher's argument is roughly as follows (1) Heraclitus saw understanding as the highest life-related function of the soul, (2) Heraclitus saw the life process as dynamic and filled with tension by analogy to the flux he perceived in nature, (3) if the *logos* is related to understanding, it must therefore reflect this life-process, thus (4) this tension must be reflected in linguistic tension (i.e. the "obscure" way that Heraclitus writes).[17]

I agree with the broad strokes of Kahn and Dilcher's interpretations, but their views are only partial, and their conclusions are somewhat vague. Their approach is very interesting, but it tells us little about any of Heraclitus' supposedly less fundamental conclusions. What did he think about human conduct? What did he think about political behavior? Many of his fragments seem to address these issues apart from the fundamental conclusion about the dialectical process of understanding. In other words, Kahn and Dilcher have neglected the less grandiose bits of Heraclitus for this "big picture" view.

In addition, Kahn seems to have followed Diogenes Laertius in holding that Heraclitus had no real interest in the politics of his time. Kahn seems to think that Heraclitus was somewhere between a conservative aristocrat and a Solonic neutral arbiter, but he places no real emphasis on the roles that politics and religion may have played in shaping Heraclitus' views. Indeed, he concludes that Heraclitus had only "a lucid, almost Hobbesian appreciation of the fact that civilized life and communal survival depend upon loyalty to the *nomos*, the law in which all citizens have a share … but which may be realized in the leadership of a single outstanding man."[18]

But this gives too short a shrift to Heraclitus as a political thinker. He may not have been John Rawls, but he says more about politics than this. Indeed, even many of the "bigger picture" fragments suggest that he had ethical and political views. Thus, a fragment like DK53 "**A lifetime**

[16] Dilcher, 9.

[17] Dilcher, 100–101.

[18] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 3.

(*aion*) **is a child playing, playing checkers: the kingship belongs to a child**," may have cosmic importance—Kahn suggests that the first two clauses suggest the rule-based back and forth of cosmic flux[19]—but it may also suggest a negative view of kingship or tyranny. A view which is supported by several anecdotes about Heraclitus challenging tyrants, turning down a job with the Persian emperor, etc. During Heraclitus' lifetime the issue of rule by foreign-backed tyrant was foregrounded by the Ionian Revolt and the Persian Wars. Thus, historical context suggests that Heraclitus may be expressing a political opinion relevant to these issues. The point is not that these anecdotes are verified historical events, merely that they suggest that Heraclitus had a certain reputation. This reputation in turn allows a reasonable inference that he had certain negative views about things like kings, for example.

C. The Need for Historical Context

I maintain that Kahn's neglect of this context prevents him from confirming, as Diodotus asserts, that Heraclitus was greatly interested in both politics and ethics. Indeed, insofar as the doctrine of the unity of opposites is, as Kahn claims, a truth about human existence it can also be understood as political/ethical truth abstracted from the turbulent and transitional period in which Heraclitus lived. Before the Persian Wars, mainland Greece and Ionia had almost completely broken from the Bronze Age shackles of the *oikos* and individual family-focused model to the synoecistic model of the *polis*. Innovative ideas of law and new social customs began to develop. Greece's encounters with political "others" like Persians and other "eastern" cultures began to reveal to Hellas that it was defined by two main differences from its neighbors: (1) common myths found in Homer, Hesiod, and the other poets, and (2) the regional peculiarity of the *polis*.

In myth, we see this in the repeated comparison of Greek life to that of cultures alien too it. Thus, in the *Odyssey* Homer (ca. 800-750 B.C.E.) describes the Cyclopes as *athemiston*

[19] Kahn, 227–29.

(lawless/unlawful) since they have no councils or assemblies to make their laws but are each their own lawgiver.[20] Homer is clearly projecting something of his own time onto the much earlier period (somewhere between 1750 B.C.E. - 1300 B.C.E.) he describes in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Accordingly, the plain comparison is between the cyclopes and Homer's (probably Geometric Period 900-700 B.C.E) audience who were then living in *poleis* and making their laws in assemblies and councils (i.e. *in common* with one another).

Real-world "others" like the Persians also provided a neat contrast. To the Persian king, the Greek method of hashing things out in discussion, in common, was strange at best, untrustworthy at worst.[21] Hence, Cyrus' insult to the Spartans that Greeks meet in the *agora* to "swear false oaths and cheat[] one another."[22] This was a strange insult, as the Spartans were not known for either public deliberation or mercantile dealings which were the hallmarks of the Athenian employment of the *agora*. Cyrus was basically employing a stereotype of Greek culture; treating all Hellenes as the same. Thus, the notion that there might be a Greek culture in common was slowly emerging when the Great King decided to invade the Greek homeland in retaliation for Attic solidarity with Ionia. This invasion would cement that emerging view of Greek-ness and make way for philosophers like Plato and Aristotle to critique and theorize about it. It was during this remarkable transition period in Greek thought that Heraclitus was born.

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[20] Homer, *The Odyssey: Books 1-12*, ed. George E. Dimock, trans. A. T. Murray, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), bk. 9.106.

[21] This was probably and perhaps paradoxically due to the Persian obsession with truth. To Persian culture telling a lie was one of the most terrible acts imaginable. The "marketplace of ideas" represented by the *agora* would thus have seemed to invite deception. Interesting, Heraclitus himself also emphasizes the importance of truth. Consider DK112: **To be moderate: the greatest virtue. / Wisdom: to speak the truth and to act in conformity with the nature** [scil. Of each thing]**, understanding it.**

[22] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*, ed. Robert B. Strassler and Rosalind Thomas, trans. Andrea L. Purvis, Reprint edition (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), bk. 1.153.

II. Initial Objections to this Project

There are, of course, potential objections to my methodological approach to Heraclitus that we must consider. In this section I will consider two of them. First, I will explain why it is plausible that a book called *Peri Physeos* (lit. "on nature") could contain thoughts on more than just natural philosophy. I will examine the genre represented by books "on nature" that was invented in the generation before Heraclitus was born.[23] Next, I will consider two connected objections about the value of our historical sources for Heraclitus and the periods he lived. My focus will be in challenging an argument made by Kurt Raaflaub that our sources either tell us nothing useful or are too unreliable to use. In short, I believe that he radically underestimates the usefulness of our sources for interpreting Heraclitus while overestimating their unreliability.

A. On the Title '*Peri Physeos*'

What are we to make of the fact that Heraclitus' book was probably called *Peri Physeos* ("On Nature")? In modern English, this title suggests a treatise on the environment or perhaps on physical laws. In other words, it indicates a kind of scientific inquiry. But in the time of the Presocratics, it arguably had a different, broader meaning. The etymological root of the term for nature, *physis*, implies growth or coming into being, as a plant grows from a seed.[24] The first known use of the word "*physis*" is in the Odyssey when Hermes explains to Odysseus how the *physis* of a plant will prevent him from being turned into a pig by Circe: "So saying, Argeiphontes gave me the

[23] While the genre of *historia peri physeos* is generally agreed to exist prior to Heraclitus, scholars debate when the title *Peri Physeos* was first used. For example, Alexandrian scholars generally entitled all works by the Milesians Pre-Socratics as such. Others like Burnet doubt that ancient philosophers used titles for their works at all and thus any title would be a spurious later addition. Gerard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature: The Politics of Theory-Building and Pedagogy in Composition* (SUNY Press, 2012), 16.

[24] Naddaf, 12.

herb, pulling it out of the ground, and showed me its nature [*physin*]."[25] Here context strongly suggests that the word "designates the process by which the object becomes what it is."[26]

The first known Pre-Socratic use of the word is in Heraclitus[27] in DK1 when he claims "**For, although all things come about according to this account** (*logos*)**, they resemble people without experience of them, when they have experience both of words and of things of the sort that I explain when I analyze each in conformity with its nature** [*physis*] **and indicate how it is.**" Noticing the continuity between this use of the term and Homer's, Gerard Naddaf has argued that the best way to understand the Pre-Socratic conception of the term is as referring to the entire development of the object of inquiry. The word "*physis/phusis*" "is never employed in the sense of something static, although the accent may be on either the *phusis* as origin, the *phusis* as process, or the *phusis* as result. All three, of course, are comprised in the original meaning of the word *phusis*."[28] Nadaff is not alone in this contention either; Raflaaub writes that the Pre-Socratics "were primarily interested in *physis*, the natural world and its origin and functioning; man and human society were part of *physis*, subject to its laws, and not considered separately."[29]

The "title" *Peri Physeos*, was part of a genre (*historia peri physeos*) of writing possibly originated by Anaximander—a thinker who profoundly influenced Heraclitus.[30] Unfortunately, all we have of his work is a brief paragraph describing his cosmology. Anaximander's cosmological model is one of concentric rings with the earth placed at the center.[31] But why? Typical answers rely on the mythical significance of the numbers in the arrangement, astronomical observations made by Anaximander,

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[25] Homer, *The Odyssey*, 10.303.

[26] Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 14.

[27] Naddaf, 14.

[28] Naddaf, 15.

[29] Kurt. A. Raaflaub, "Intellectual Achievements," in *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece*, ed. H. A. Shapiro (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 575.

[30] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 33; Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 17.

[31] Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 77–79; Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume II*, 301 (A26).

and architectural proportions.[32] The hypothesis that I (and Naddaf) find the most compelling is that political considerations inspired his cosmological model. On this view, older cosmological arrangements like that of Greece's near eastern neighbors, and those assumed by Hesiod, were hierarchical because human society was hierarchical.[33] With the rise of the *polis* one of the most distinct differences would have been the political and (often literal) centrality of the *agora* (public gathering place).[34] In the *agora*, citizens were at least nominally recognized as *isoi* (equals) or *homoioi* (peers).[35] As Naddaf puts it

> The agora is thus the symbol of a spatial structure radically different from the one which characterizes the oriental monarchies. The power (*kratos*, *archē*, and *dunasteia*) is no longer situated at the top of the ladder. The power is disposed *es meson*, in the center, in the middle of the human group.[36]

Aristotle seems to support this contention when he writes that the earth, according to Anaximander remains at rest in the center "because of equality (*homoiotês*)."[37] This center was metaphorically ringed by the three Milesian social classes present during Anaximander's lifetime: the aristocracy, a "middle class," and the peasantry.[38] The rings of the stars, moon, and sun in his cosmology would then correspond to the sociopolitical relationship between these classes and the *agora*/earth.[39]

In other words, Anaximander saw the development of the political institutions of his time as related to the natural order. Proper politics then would be the attempt to live as nearly as possible with this natural order. This might have been something like a law-governed arrangement where the duties and honors of political office were equitably distributed and rotated to prevent domination by

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[32] Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 79–82.

[33] Naddaf, 83.

[34] Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36–37.

[35] Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 84.

[36] Naddaf, 84.

[37] Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume II*, 301 (A26).

[38] Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature*, 85.

[39] Naddaf, 85.

one social class.[40] That aside, Naddaf is able to detect topical commonalities in all the pre-Socratics: they largely wrote in this new *peri physeos* or *historia peri physeos* style. That is to say, "all pre-Socratics attempted to account for the origin and development of the present order of things and their respective accounts were comprised in the scheme of three elements: a cosmogony, a zoogony, and a politogony."[41] Hence if we contextualize Heraclitus' own *Peri Physeos* as a work associated with this genre, it is not strange that he would include politics as part of an exploration of the "nature" of things.

A further implication of the connection made by Pre-Socratics like Heraclitus between the political and the natural is what it says about later debates about the distinction between *nomos* and *physis*. The 5th Century sophistic distinction between the terms marks a rupture with the earlier use that connected the two. The lack of precedent for the events of the Peloponnesian War spurred skepticism about that connection.[42] This led to a questioning of human norms and conventions represented by *nomos* as opposed to divine or natural reality represented by *physis*. This concern about whether or not human politics and ethics were completely out of keeping with the divine/natural was not as pressing for Heraclitus. He simply had a different understanding of the terms *nomos* and *physis*.

B. Do We Have Too Little Historical Context?

Another issue which potentially challenges this project concerns the quantity of evidence we have for Heraclitus' historical context. If Heraclitus were a figure of the 17th or 18th centuries C.E. we would be spoiled for historical evidence. We would have contemporary histories, legal and other official documents, books on contemporary thinking which may have influenced his own, and probably letters by him or to him. But we have much less material of this kind for any Ionian Greek

[40] Naddaf, 87–88.

[41] Naddaf, 113.

[42] Ryan K. Balot, *Greek Political Thought* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 99.

of the 6th to 5th century B.C.E. While some regions may have gone beyond mere scribal literacy, we have no evidence of anything like mass literacy.[43] Indeed the only ways to view written materials were 1) public postings on stelae, etc., 2) obtaining a hand-copied version of a text, or 3) physically going to the location where the text was stored. As a matter of fact, this last method of "publication" is the one Heraclitus chose by giving his book as a dedication in the Artemesion.

1. Raaflaub's Challenge

Given these realities, little written historical evidence can be expected to survive today, and even less that was written within Heraclitus' lifetime. Accordingly, it is fair to ask if what little we have is too little to contextualize Heraclitus' thought at all. One of the few explicit critiques along these lines is Kurt A. Raaflaub's.[44] After rejecting all the biographical details we find in Diogenes Laertius, Plutarch, and Clement of Alexandria as useless or fictional[45], he argues the following:

> What does [the historical context] mean for our understanding of Heraclitus? Not much because we do not know any details. For this very reason. even the reasonable assumption that Heraclitus's philosophy was at least partly rooted in his reaction to contemporary events and experiences does not bring us any further. All we can say is that probably for most of his life-time his polis was indeed governed by Persian-imposed tyranny and from soon after 494 by a more 'isonomic' system in which at least a sizable part of the citizen body had a say…. Given our condition of almost complete ignorance of Heraclitus's life and circumstances. the only sound approach leads through his own statements – despite all uncertainties and difficulties this entails.[46]

He goes on to conclude that from Heraclitus' words alone we can detect a political component to his thinking that includes "interesting and serious concerns for the community and the common good."[47]

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[43] William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 64.

[44] Raaflaub, "Shared Responsibility for the Common Good: Heraclitus, Early Philosophy, and Political Thought."

[45] Raaflaub, 103.

[46] Raaflaub, 104–5.

[47] Raaflaub, 105. Interestingly, this is not so different from my own conclusions on Heraclitus' politics although I show how these "concerns" connect to other parts of his philosophy in a way that Raaflaub does not.

In other words, Raaflaub's argument against the relevance of historical context in interpreting Heraclitus is as follows. First, Raaflaub believes that biographical information about Heraclitus is useless or fiction "most likely spun out of the philosophers own statements."[48] Even if this were not so, he continues, we don't have a detailed enough history of Ephesus or Ionia to help us interpret him; we only know that it transitioned from client-state of Persia to *isonomia*. We do, however, have his own statements in the fragments. He concludes by claiming that we can only look to the fragments to understand Heraclitus.

Raaflaub's argument unfairly represents our historical resources in two ways. First, he too strongly discounts the usefulness of Diogenes Laertius' biography of Heraclitus. Second, he seriously underplays the importance of Ephesus' transition from client-state to *isonomia*.

2. The Problems of Ancient Biography

Concerning the first issue raised by Raaflaub, it is true that the credibility of ancient biography is a debated matter. Unlike modern biography and history, the avowed purpose of most of ancient examples of this genre was to provide edification or moral exempla first, information about the past, second. Plutarch famously is more interested in the moral lessons that can be derived from biographical anecdotes than he was with their veracity.[49] Diogenes Laertius, on the other hand, is adamant that he wants to provide an organized and coherent history of philosophy.[50] While this affords him a clean historical narrative, he runs the risk of forcing individual biographies into that narrative. We can usually guess which philosophical views Diogenes (or his sources) disapproves of

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[48] Raaflaub, 103.

[49] Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, Volume I: (A Modern Library E-Book)* (Random House Publishing Group, 2000), 20–22.

[50] Laertius, *Diogenes Laertius*, 1–5. His chief concern is to make it clear that the Greeks were the first true philosophers and not any other culture like the Egyptians or Chaldeans.

by his inclusion of scurrilous anecdotes about this or that philosopher – for example, Heraclitus' supposed death by burying himself in cow manure.[51]

This problem is at the heart of Raaflaub's assertion that biographical information about Heraclitus is useless or fiction derived from sayings in *Peri Physeos*, itself; that Heraclitus' "biography" was "most likely spun out of the philosophers own statements."[52] His view is similar to Ava Chitwood's that "biographical tradition, favorable or hostile, arises from the subject's philosophy, but even more so from the biographers' reaction to the subject's philosophical work, read in a personal manner as autobiography and not as philosophy."[53] In other words, since Diogenes Laertius didn't like something Heraclitus wrote, he crafted or curated anecdotes that cast the philosopher in a bad light.

This reading finds support in the text of the biography itself where Diogenes uses a fragment as evidence to support his biographical evaluation of Heraclitus. For example, he claims that Heraclitus was "lofty-minded beyond all other men, and over-weening, as is clear from his book in which he says: 'Much learning does not teach understanding; else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, or, again, Xenophanes and Hecataeus.'"[54] While perhaps a bit overstated, Diogenes interpretation of Heraclitus' personality is not completely implausible.

However, Diogenes' account is not without fault. He tends to present editorial remarks as biographical facts. But does any of this mean that we cannot trust Diogenes' account to have *any* useful biographical facts? I would submit that we can still find some useful facts in Diogenes; that asserting otherwise is a misunderstanding of the history of Greek biography and a conclusion that goes beyond the evidence.

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[51] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:411.

[52] Raaflaub, "Shared Responsibility for the Common Good: Heraclitus, Early Philosophy, and Political Thought," 103.

[53] Ava Chitwood, *Death by Philosophy: The Biographical Tradition in the Life and Death of the Archaic Philosophers Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Democritus* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3–4.

[54] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:409.

3. A Brief History of Ancient Greek Biography

We can roughly divide early biography written in Greek into three periods. For convenience, I will refer to these periods as Ionian, Attic, and Hellenistic. The Ionian contained our first known Greek biographies and autobiographies (500 – 480 B.C.E.).[55] These biographies, much like the nascent historiography of that period were straightforward accounts of figures of political importance. Interest in biography seems concentrated in Ionia, rather than mainland Greece.[56] This may be due to the influence of the Persian interest in biographical accounts on the empire's Greek subjects. This idea is supported by the fact that "both Skylax and Xanthus, the first biographers in the Greek language known to us, were Persian subjects."[57] As Momogliano writes, "Interest in kings and tyrants is natural where kings and tyrants rule."[58] The private stories of kings and tyrants would have acted as excellent propaganda as well. By contrast, interest in biography was very low in Athens, since in the *polis* "private circumstances were made public and exploited by writers of comedy and hostile orators or demagogues."[59]

The Attic approach abruptly replaced these fifth-century biographical experiments in the fourth century.[60] The emergence of powerful military and political leaders, and the ever-changing power dynamic between Athens and her neighbors focused attention on individual political leaders.[61] This new prominence put pressure on writers to examine the lives of these figures in greater detail. Often biographers could not find much detail in the sources available. The problem was stark.

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[55] Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography: Expanded Edition*, 2 edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 101.

[56] Momigliano, 32.

[57] Momigliano, 36.

[58] Momigliano, 35.

[59] Momigliano, 34. The last thing an Athenian politician needed was scandal that could lose him an election or earn him an ostracism, so privacy would have been paramount.

[60] Momigliano, 44.

[61] Momigliano, 45.

Readers wanted accounts of the "education, romantic entanglements, and characters of the subjects read about. [But] [s]ince these features were less frequently supportable by documentation, biographers naturally resorted to fiction."[62] Thus "[biography in the fourth century] came to occupy an ambiguous position between fact and imagination."[63]

This sort of biography was the norm until the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C.E. Philip II of Macedon's decisive defeat of Athens and Thebes was a turning point in the history of Greece; it ended any real Greek political autonomy for over a millennium. One change wrought by the coming of Macedonian rule was an end to "experimentation on the borders between reality and fiction"[64] in biography. In its place, biography came under the sway of the Hellenistic "attitude of analysis and stock-taking."[65] The champion of this approach to biography was the Pythagorean turned Peripatetic Aristoxenus. According to Momigliano, the Hellenistic approach that mixed "erudition, scholarly zeal, realism of details, and gossip"[66] was his creation. In this era, "biography provided entertainment for educated people who liked to know something about the lives of poets, philosophers, and kings."[67] The Romans, as with so much else, took over this Hellenistic approach, and it spread with their empire. It is this tradition that informed the work of Diogenes Laertius.

4. Diogenes Laertius' Credibility

We do not know his precise dates, but Diogenes Laertius lived some time during third-century C.E.[68] Much work on history of philosophy today depends on Diogenes' *Lives of the*

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[62] Momigliano, 56–57.

[63] Momigliano, 46..

[64] Momigliano, 65.

[65] Momigliano, 65.

[66] Momigliano, 103.

[67] Momigliano, 84.

[68] Richard Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laertius: Its Spirit and Its Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), 5.

Philosophers to a greater or lesser degree.[69] As a citizen of the Roman Empire he assumed a thoroughly Hellenistic approach to biography. The "gossipy" part of this approach[70] seems to be the source of much of the criticism leveled at his work. It is true that he "spends considerable effort relating the personal characteristics of philosophers, such as how they dressed, what they liked to eat, how they exercised, their favorite pastimes, whether they drank alcohol, and what they said about or did for friendship, marriage, and sex."[71] His work largely fits into what has been called the "successions" genre, in which the focus is on the personal relationship between the individuals he writes about rather than any doxographical[72] connections.[73]

Since the prurient details seem philosophically irrelevant, it is easy to assume that these details must be fictional. It is probable that this sort of analysis leads critics of Diogenes like Raaflaub to conclude that all of Diogenes' biographical details are suspect and not just the "gossipy" ones. This conclusion, however, goes too far. It is anachronistic and goes beyond the evidence.

First, the perspective that personal details are irrelevant to understanding a philosopher is a contemporary one that many ancient writers, including Diogenes, did not share. To authors like Diogenes, these details were important to answering the question: "how should one live?"[74] For ancient readers *the life* and *not just the arguments* of philosophers were *models to imitate* and build upon. This is comparable to the way that contemporary philosophers admire the life of Socrates. We admire not just his skill at philosophical analysis, but also the saintly conviction he displays in the *Apology* and *Phaedo*. Indeed, Socrates' decision to submit to poisoning instead of fleeing into exile is a

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[69] Hope, 1,34.

[70] A perhaps unfair criticism since as Josh Wilburn has pointed out to me this was hardly new in Diogenes' day since, for example, Plato referred to the apocryphal story of Thales being so concerned with the heavens he fell into a well.

[71] Paul Swift, "The History and Mystery of Diogenes Laertius," *Prajna Vihara* 8, no. 1 (2007): 42, http://www.assumptionjournal.au.edu/index.php/PrajnaVihara/article/view/1234.

[72] "Doxographical" refers to writings describing the views of philosophers.

[73] Jørgen Mejer, "Diogenes Laertius and the Transmission of Greek Philosophy," in *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Römischen Welt. Teil II*, vol. 36.5 (Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 3561.

[74] Mejer, 3561.

fascinating philosophical issue in its own right. Decisions about life and politics are ethically important. There is little reason to think that this would be any different for the philosophers who came before and after him.

Second, we have straightforward evidence that Diogenes was not especially mendacious. He makes 1,186 references to 250 different authors and cites at least 365 different books as sources.[75] His differing presentation of his biographical subjects reveals that he seems to have stayed within the limits of these sources. For all Post-Socratic schools, Diogenes presented a generalized doxographical account of the school. Usually this account was included as part of the Life of the school's founder.[76] Only in the Life of Pythagoras, does he deviate from this approach.[77] This suggests that either Diogenes had no sources about Pre-Socratic schools themselves, or that there were none that matched Post-Socratic models.[78] Further, since nothing was known of the life of the philosopher Leucippus, Diogenes crafted a Life that was nothing but doxography.[79] If he were as unreliable as Raaflaub claims, he would have just invented biographical details for Leucippus. Indeed, he could have generated one from the doxography itself, along the lines that Chitwood suggests.

That Diogenes did not do this is at least evidence that he was interested in telling the most truthful account that he could. I am not claiming that he does not embellish or editorialize. It is impossible to prove he does not do the former and I gave an example above where I think he does

[75] Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laertius*, 59.

[76] Mejer, "Diogenes Laertius and the Transmission of Greek Philosophy," 3563.

[77] Mejer, 3563.

[78] Mejer, 3564. In other words, none would have been classified as schools given the Postsocratic schools as models.

[79] Mejer, 3594.

the latter.[80] But neither of these features is peculiar to Diogenes. They both stem from the Hellenistic biographical tradition he was part of.

Careful reading can easily tell us when Diogenes is editorializing about a fragment, and when he is relating a detail from his sources. I gave an example of the former above. For the latter, consider Diogenes' claim that Heraclitus turned down the kingship: "As a proof of his magnanimity Antisthenes[81] in his *Successions of Philosophers* cites the fact that [Heraclitus] renounced his claim to the kingship in favour of his brother."[82] Notice that Diogenes cites a source for this claim, a practice not all ancient authors could be relied upon to do with any regularity. It is thus unlikely that he derived this biographical fact from Heraclitus' philosophy. In addition, this fact is about political figures, which we have seen was the preferred topic of archaic biographers. Hence it is probable this is an actual anecdote about the archaic Ionian philosopher. There are numerous other examples in other biographies in the *Lives*, where he does this. Diogenes likes to derive personal characteristics *from his interpretations of the writings* of his subjects. This appears to be why he declares Plato to be jealous, Antisthenes persuasive, Chrysippus arrogant, and Empedocles boastful.[83]

In other places Diogenes mixes editorialized biographical elements with those from his sources. Thus, we find in the same paragraph a claim that Heraclitus was "nobody's pupil" on the basis of DK 101: "I searched for myself," and that according to Sotion, Heraclitus was a student of

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[80] It seems to me that he selected his account(s) of Heraclitus' death from the biographical tradition for their shock value and because of Diogenes' dim view of the philosopher. He includes a piece of his own work that wonders how Heraclitus managed to die in such a disgusting painful manner. He writes "Often I have wondered how it came about that Heraclitus endured to live in this miserable fashion and then to die. For a fell disease flooded his body with water, quenched the light in his eyes and brought on darkness." Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:411, (IX.4).

[81] He is probably referring to Antisthenes of Rhodes, an early 2nd Century B.C.E. historian and philosopher.

[82] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:415.

[83] Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laertius*, 128.

Xenophanes.[84] There are other examples where the reader can easily discern the editorial from the sourced bits of the biography. If Diogenes intended to deceive his readers, he did a terrible job.

In short, we have no reason to be as dismissive of Diogenes as Raaflaub is inclined to be. Diogenes is as careful as can be expected given the norms of ancient biography. Where those norms differ from our own we may suspect he is speculating and draw conclusions more cautiously. Both facts defang the criticism in Raaflaub's first point. The information in Diogenes' Life of Heraclitus is not useless, and any "fiction" is separable from the facts. For example, the only place in Diogenes' account where there is a serious conflict between the accounts he includes concerns Heraclitus' death. On this matter he cites two sources giving different accounts of death by cow dung and two sources claiming he died of an illness. The most likely explanation for these "death by dung" accounts is that they are an extrapolation from one fragment, DK96: **Corpses are more to be thrown out than manure.**

Further, several of the reported facts about Heraclitus' biography point in the same general direction, justifying a greater degree of confidence in them than might otherwise be justified. This is clearly the case in Diogenes Laertius' account. He recounts, for example, multiple sources claiming *Peri Physeos* discussed politics. He also writes the several anecdotes suggesting Heraclitus' "independence" like his rejection of the "kingship," his not having a teacher, and his rejection of a job with the Persian emperor.[85] Thus I argue that there is room to assume that there are some facts in Diogenes' account that we can appeal to in order to understand Heraclitus better.

In the next section, I will endeavor to set down what I think those facts are.

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[84] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:418. The issue of teacher/pupil influence on Heraclitus may have colored Diogenes' view of the philosopher. A major concern of the *Lives* is to show that philosophy could only be understood as a kind of educational genealogy in which a pupil philosopher learns from a teacher, and so on. Hope, *The Book of Diogenes Laertius*, 99.

[85] Agreement about the general direction of his life and personality is also in one of our few other sources. His rejection of a job as advisor to the Persian emperor is consistent with the story Clement tells that Heraclitus convinced the tyrant Melancomas to step down and Clement relates these stories together. Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III*, 127.

III. Heraclitus: The Biographical Details in Historical Context

A. The Biography

The following are what I judge to be the biographical facts about Heraclitus from Diogenes' Life of Heraclitus and other sources.[86] In other words, they are (1) not plainly "editorialized" from fragments, and (2) either they are the type of fact that have a higher probability of preservation (i.e. political events, birthplace, name of the work, etc.), or they seem to be rooted in something true about him (e.g. he may never have written to the Persian king, but the story is consistent with other anti-Persian stories about him). Heraclitus (*Herakleitos*), son of Bloson, was born in the Ionian city if Ephesus (*Ephesos*) in the 530s B.C.E. His floruit date is given in Diogenes Laertius as the 69th Olympiad (504-501 B.C.E.)[87] and he is said to have lived for 60 years, giving us something like ca. 534 - 474 B.C.E. for his dates (with the floruit in the middle). He was probably some kind of aristocrat, and his biographical details strongly suggest that his family claimed to be descendants of the mythical founder of Ephesus, Androklos.[88] If this is correct, then the "kingship" Diogenes Laertius says he turned down in favor of his brother most likely was a priestly position analogous to the *archon basileis* of Athens.[89] Strabo claims that Androklids were called "*basileis*" and entitled to the "privilege of front seats at the games and of wearing purple robes as insignia of royal descent, and staff instead of sceptre, and of the superintendence of the sacrifices in honor of the Eleusinian Demeter."[90] Heraclitus was allegedly asked to be a legislator by his fellow Ephesians, which he

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[86] Such as Clement of Alexandria, Plutarch, and Hippolytus.

[87] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:409; Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 1.

[88] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 2.

[89] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bk. 9.6. He also reportedly rejected an offer from the Persian emperor Darius to come to his court. But this could just be a gloss on either (1) rejection of Persian rule, or (2) his desire to remain out of politics. Laertius, vol. 2, bk. 9.14.

[90] Strabo, *Strabo: Geography, Volume VI, Books 13-14*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), bk. 14.1.3.

declined "because the state was already in the grip of a bad constitution [*ponera politea*]."[91] He also is said to have denied a job at the Persian court[92] and to have persuaded the pro-Persian tyrant Melankomas to abdicate.[93] He placed his book, possibly called *On Nature* (*Peri Physeos*), as a dedication in the Artemesion.[94] The book was reportedly "divided into three discourses, one on the universe [*pantos*], another on politics, and a third on theology."[95]

B. History of Ephesus

Of no less importance to his thinking are the details of the city in which he lived. Ephesus was probably founded during the Dark Age (1100 -700 B.C.E.) or early Archaic Period (700 – 480 B.C.E.), supposedly by Athenian settlers. There is, however, no archaeological evidence to support this ancient contention.[96] At best, it may reflect the cultural and linguistic affinities between the two *poleis* or an anachronistic reading of their political connections *post*-Persian Wars back into that much earlier period. Ephesus may have counted the island of Samos as part of its territory for a time.[97] A pre-colonial settlement apparently existed and the colonists may have driven out (or perhaps more likely integrated with) the local Leleges and Lydians.[98] "Leleges" may merely be a Greek general term for the pre-Greek inhabitants of Ionia and not a distinct people.[99]

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[91] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bks. 9.2-3.

[92] Laertius, vol. 2, bks. 9.13-15.

[93] Clement, *Stromateis, Books 1-3*, trans. John Ferguson, The Fathers of the Church 85 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 72.

[94] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bks. 9.5-6. On the relevance of this title see a discussion on the matter below.

[95] Laertius, vol. 2, bks. 9.5-6.

[96] Pausanias, *Pausanias: Description of Greece, Volume III, Books 6-8*, trans. W. H. S. Jones (Harvard University Press / Heinemann, 1933), bk. VIII.2.8.

[97] Pausanias, bk. VII.2.8-9.

[98] Pausanias, bk. VIII.2.8.

[99] Vanessa B. Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia: A History of the City to 400 B.C.E.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 17.

It is unclear how the city was governed, but it is probably safe to assume that it did not diverge too far from the contemporary models. Indeed, Ephesus probably had a Solonic constitution from the sixth century until the end of the rule of the tyrant Melankomas in the beginning of the fifth century. [100] This constitution may have been put in place by Aristarchos of Athens when the Ephesians called him to rule them.

From its very beginning, Ephesus was a settlement that was open to eastern influences. The best example is "the cult and image of Artemis of Ephesus, a Greek goddess grafted onto an Anatolian deity by the first Greek settlers."[101] The distinctive image of the goddess as "many-breasted" appears to be an early feature of the goddess at Ephesus, although the "breasts" may have originally been "bulbs" similar to Carian depictions of Zeus.[102] The feature probably dates back to the Hittite tradition of depicting gods as wearing an animal-skin bag called a *kursas*, which was a symbolic analogue to a cornucopia.[103]

In ca. 560 B.C.E. Croesus (*Kroisos*) of Lydia laid siege to the city.[104] Desperate to win a losing battle, the Ephesians, under the direction of the tyrant Pindar (*Pindaros*),[105] dedicated their city to Artemis "by tying a rope from the temple to the city wall."[106] Croesus reacted to this dedication by granting Ephesus relative freedom among Lydia's Hellenic subjects on the condition that Pindar

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[100] Hans-Joachim Gehrke, *Stasis: Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr* (München: Beck, 1985), 57.

[101] Sarah P. Morris, "The View from East Greece: Miletus, Samos and Ephesus," in *Debating Orientalization: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Processes of Change in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Nicholas C. Vella and Corinna Riva, vol. Monographs in Mediterranean archaeology (London: Equinox), 70, http://ls-tlss.ucl.ac.uk/course-materials/ARCL1004_44499.pdf.

[102] Morris, 70.

[103] Morris, 70.

[104] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 1.26.

[105] Aelian, *Aelian: Historical Miscellany*, trans. Nigel G. Wilson, annotated edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), bk. 3.26.

[106] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 1.26.

(Croesus' nephew[107]) was exiled.[108] It was Croesus who helped rebuild the Artemision (which was destroyed in a 7th century flood) by donating columns for the construction project.[109] This may be the beginning of the city's close cultural connections with Lydia which is chiefly evident in the architectural style of the Artemesion.[110]

After the conquest of the city, Pindar was replaced by the *aisymnetes* Pasicles.[111] It is unclear what the word "*aisymnetes*" meant at this time, as uses range from priestly office to something analogous to the Athenian *archon*.[112] This interpretation is reinforced by a fragment of Callimachus which reads: "You were archon [*aisymnao/eisymnao* lit. "rule over"] of Ephesus, Pasicles, but from a banquet."[113] Pasicles, in turn, was reportedly murdered by Melas, Pindar's son.[114]

In 550 B.C.E. Cyrus became king of Persia.[115] In 547/46 the Persians capture Sardis and Croesus, ending the Lydian Empire.[116] The Ionians appealed to Cyrus to maintain their autonomy from Persia but were denied.[117] Despite their attempts to fortify their cities, in 545 the Median general of Persia Harpagos conquered all of Ionia.[118] As part of this conquest, "[t]he Persians replaced, rather than destroyed, the Ionians' Lydian and Egyptian markets for luxuries and

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[107] David Asheri, Alan Lloyd, and Aldo Corcella, *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV*, ed. Oswyn Murray and Alfonso Moreno, 1 edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95.

[108] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, 1.26c.

[109] Herodotus, bk. 1.92. Dedicatory inscriptions on at least three columns that have survived from antiquity say "King Kroisos made the dedication" in Ionic script. Charles W. Fornara, trans., *Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War*, 2 edition (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 31. The Artemesion would be destroyed *again*, this time by the arsonist Herostratus in 356 B.C.E., after which it was rebuilt by the citizens of Ephesus.

[110] Morris, "The View from East Greece," 71.

[111] George Leonard Huxley, *The Early Ionians* (London: Faber, 1966), 109.

[112] Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia*, 96–99.

[113] Callimachus and Musaeus, *Callimachus: Aetia, Iambi, Hecale and Other Fragments.; Musaeus: Hero and Leander*, trans. C. A. Trypanis, T. Gelzer, and Cedric H. Whitman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 77.

[114] Huxley, *The Early Ionians*, 109–10.

[115] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 1.130.

[116] Herodotus, bk. 1.84.

[117] Herodotus, bk. 1.141.

[118] Herodotus, bk. 1.162.

mercenaries, and offered new opportunities to the Ionians by integrating them into their empire as the naval arm of their advance into Europe and the Aegean archipelago."[119]

Around this time, the Ephesians reportedly called the Athenian Aristarchos to serve as *aisymnetes* for a term of five years.[120] Aristarchos used his term to provide (or perhaps restore) a Solonic constitution for the city.[121] He was probably succeeded (ca. 541-537 B.C.E.) by the tyrants Athenagoras and Comas, who are credited with exiling the poet Hipponax.[122] It is probable that these tyrants were Persian clients of native Ionian origin. If Ephesus followed the same pattern as other cities, and we have no reason to think it did not, it is also probable that these clients were allowed some independence and respect as tyrants or pretty kings (*basileis*) under the overlordship of the Great King. [123]

Accordingly, Heraclitus was most likely a young boy when, in 521 B.C.E. Darius became king of Persia after a coup against Cambyses II, son of Cyrus.[124] For most of the philosopher's life until the Ionian Revolt, he would have been ruled by a succession of pro-Persian tyrants.[125]

Status among Ionian cities and among their self-styled *basileis* during this period was entirely dependent on the Great King's patronage.[126] Each tyrant most likely competed to get more and more privileges comparable to high-ranking Persians, most likely by extracting resources for the king

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[119] Pericles B. Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius: The Revolt Reconsidered," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 49, no. 1 (2000): 10.

[120] Gorman, *Miletos, the Ornament of Ionia*, 97.

[121] Lene Rubinstein, "Ionia," in *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis: An Investigation Conducted by The Copenhagen Polis Centre for the Danish National Research Foundation*, ed. Mogens Herman Hansen and Thomas Heine Nielsen, 1 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1071.

[122] Archilochus, Semonides, and Hipponax, *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries B.C.*, trans. Douglas E. Gerber, 2 edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 343–45.

[123] Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius," 12.

[124] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 3.88.

[125] Rubinstein, "Ionia," 1071.

[126] Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius," 12.

from his immediate subjects.[127] This Mede-izing probably bred resentment in the subject peoples of Ionia. As Pericles B. Georges writes:

> … Darius' clients broke the old rules of the game in the cities. Instead of securing popular favor by benefactions and liturgies these tyrants were responsible for quite the opposite task of collecting the dues of tribute and services which Darius had now established.[128]

In addition, these client tyrants could, in theory, remain in "power indefinitely by virtue of Persian support alone."[129] These concerns, along with the personal grandeur in which they no doubt lived, would have raised the hackles of other aristocrats in the *poleis* who did not enjoy this level of good fortune. [130]

The *polis* most "hand in glove" with the Persians was Ephesus' greatest Ionian rival, Miletus (*Miletos*).[131] The Milesian tyrant Aristagoras was probably motivated by a desire to increase his status with the Persian court by agreeing to lead the Naxian campaign.[132] If successful, it would have aided Darius in seizing control of the precious metal resources of Europe.[133] When the Naxian campaign proved to be an astounding military and financial failure for Aristagoras, his privileged position with the Persians and within Miletus came under threat.[134] Maintaining his position in the *polis* is probably why Aristagoras underwent his astonishing conversion into a supporter of *isonomia*.[135]

Aristagoras' actions in 499 B.C.E., coupled with the already simmering economic resentment in the *poleis*, led to the Ionian Revolt against the Persian Empire. It is unclear who was tyrant in Ephesus at this time, but he no doubt followed Aristagoras' example because in 498 the Ephesians

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[127] Georges, 13.

[128] Georges, 21.

[129] Georges, 22.

[130] Georges, 23.

[131] Georges, 15.

[132] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 5.31. The "Naxian campaign" refers to the 499 B.C.E. attempt by the Persian Empire to conquer the Greek island of Naxos.

[133] Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius," 15.

[134] Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 5.34.

[135] Georges, "Persian Ionia under Darius," 19.

aided the other Ionians in their siege of Sardis.[136] Later that year, the joint Ionian forces were defeated by the Persians at Ephesus.[137] By 493 Mardonius (Darius's son-in-law) had crushed the revolt outright.[138] The following year, as part of a region-wide Persian policy, the constitution of Ephesus was changed into a democratic one.[139] Gehrke speculates that it was in connection with these constitutional reforms that Hermodorus (Hermodoros) (mentioned in DK121) was banished. Presumably, the Ephesians asked Hermodorus to provide the *polis* with a new constitution, but he fell short of expectations in some way.[140]

During the Battle of Mycale in 479 B.C.E., the Ionians in the Persian fleet followed the Samian lead in switching sides to the Greeks.[141] The Milesians guarding the passes did the same.[142] This effectively amounted to a second Ionian revolt against the Persians. Following the Persian defeat, the Ionians gained recognition as independent allies of the Hellenes.[143] Given his age, Heraclitus probably died within the next decade after Mycalae. The city joined the Delian League in 454/3.[144] As there is no evidence that Ephesus changed its constitution again, it probably remained a democracy at least as late as 415/414 when it left the Delian league and revolted against Athens.[145]

On the international stage, Ephesus had a reputation of extreme flexibility and neutrality.[146] The relative wealth of the city in the region may have encouraged this policy as the Artemesion may

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136 Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 5.100.

137 Herodotus, bk. 5.102.

138 Herodotus, bk. 6.43.

139 Gehrke, *Stasis*, 57–58.

140 Gehrke, 58.

141 Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 9.103.

142 Herodotus, bk. 9.104.

143 Herodotus, bk. 9.106.

144 Rubinstein, "Ionia," 1071.

145 Rubinstein, 1071. After which the constitutional status of the city is debated with some arguing that the city fluctuated between oligarchic and democratic control.

146 Huxley, *The Early Ionians*, 140.

have been, in effect, the most important regional "bank."[147] In turn, this relative international stability may have led to relative *intra*national stability as (excepting the period that roughly coincides with Heraclitus's life) very few constitutional changes are attested in Ephesian history during antiquity.[148]

IV. A Brief Summary of My Argument

A. An Application of My View

It is my view that we can use the foregoing historical context[149] to help interpret Heraclitus' difficult writing. For example, we know that Heraclitus seems to have been critical of his fellow citizens since he twice criticizes them in the fragments. First there is the fragment concerning Hermodorus[150], DK121: **All the adult Ephesians ought to hang themselves and to leave the city to beardless boys: for they exiled Hermodorus, the one man of them who mas most beneficial, saying, "Let there not be one man among who is the most beneficial -- otherwise, may he be elsewhere among others."** Second there is DK125a: **"May your wealth never abandon you,"** he said, **"men of Ephesus, so that your wickedness can be proven."** In combination they tell us that Heracltius thought the Ephesians love wealth above ethical behavior (DK125a) and do not know what or who serves the interests of the *polis* best. But this only leaves us with more questions. That is to say, the fragments do not tell us what Hermodorus was actually exiled for or what "wickedness" the Ephesians were guilty of.

Here is where history can provide some possible answers. Diogenes tells us that Heraclitus refused to become a legislator because Ephesus was already in the grip of a "bad constitution." [151]

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[147] Gehrke, *Stasis*, 59.

[148] Gehrke, 58–59.

[149] With some elaboration on specific issues like religion, law, and politics in the next few chapters.

[150] Mentioned above in Section II.B.

[151] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bks. 9.2-3.

The Greek for "bad constitution" here is *ponera politea*. *Poneros* can mean everything from painful and grievous to worthless and knavish. *Politea* can mean "constitution" (as the translator here has chosen), but it could also refer to the citizens of a *polis* themselves. Hence we can render the bit from Diogenes as: Heraclitus refused to become a legislator because Ephesus was in the grip of a "wicked citizenry". This neatly fits with DK121 and 125a because they both represent critiques of the Ephesian citizenry as bad in some way; DK125a in fact uses the word *ponereumenoi* for "wickedness" and thus the same word is used in both the biographical anecdote and in the fragment. This is one small way in which using history can help us understand Heraclitus.

History, however, has more help with these two fragments. Recall that in the last paragraph of the previous section we learned that Ephesus had an extremely flexible foreign policy which saw it side with whomever was the regional power at the time. This led to its relative stability and probably its great wealth. Recall also that Heraclitus seems to proclaim the centrality of conflict in several fragments. There seems to be a mismatch between Heraclitus views about conflict and the history of Ephesus. This mismatch makes more sense when we include DK121 and DK125a back into the picture. Both fragments (and the Diogenes anecdote) reveal that Heraclitus was critical of the Ephesian citizenry as wicked and wealthy. With the benefit of historical context, we can now venture as to *why* he had this critique. Heraclitus saw the Ephesian aversion to conflict as a kind of moral failing.[152]

B. Summary of the Essay

This is a sample of the interpretive potential of the approach I have argued for in this chapter. I wish to argue that if we contextualize Heraclitus historically, as I have done above, we can open up hitherto neglected areas of his thought. I believe that the influence that contemporary

[152] In Heraclitus we thus have a thinker who, like the later Socrates, stood apart from contemporary opinion in favor of a philosophical position.

religion and politics had on his thinking can explain and make disparate themes in the fragments not only explicable, but more sophisticated than previously recognized.

Up till now approaches to Heraclitus on religion have focused on his attitudes toward religion rather than its influence on him. My approach seeks to emphasize this aspect of his relationship to the religion of his time to further understand his ideas. To that end, I think we can find several interesting connections. We can detect in his ideas borrowings from the cults of Demeter/Kore at Eleusis and Apollo at Delphi. These influences help explain key Heraclitean terms like *xynos*; they also explain why he felt the need to write in such a cryptic often ambiguous style. For example, his cryptic sayings about life and death have a distinctly Eleusinian cast to them. In the Mysteries mortals and immortals were brought closer, the line between them was made ambiguous; this is something that not only Heraclitus, but later Plato, would take note of. Further, the Mysteries were a communal experience that transcended the usual social divisions in the Greek world. We see echoes of this in the Heraclitean idea of the *xynos* (i.e. "shared" or "common").

He could not easily communicate the fruitful ambiguities of the Mysteries in words. First, because the rituals were secret, and second because words are too easily misunderstood or distorted. Accordingly, Heraclitus turned to the oracular ambiguity exemplified by the Oracle at Delphi for a writing model. Just as that Oracle used ambiguous poetry to give a focus to communal discussion and decision-making, Heraclitus seems to have hoped his own poetry would spark similar behavior in his readers.

We can see this emphasis on the common/communal extended into his political thinking as well. Here the influence of contemporary developments in law and politics were key. Inspired by the complicated politics of his time, the development of the *polis* as an institution, and drawing on political and religious metaphors he had access to as a member of a priestly family, Heraclitus concluded that the common thread in human life was the same as can be observed in nature:

conflict, where that means both things in opposition to one another, but also to indicate the interdependence of those opposed things as in DK51: **They do not comprehend how, diverging, it accords with itself: a backward-turning fitting-together** (*harmonia*)**, as of a bow and a lyre.** It is hardly a coincidence that the bow and the lyre were associated with the god Apollo.

During his lifetime, Heraclitus experienced the rule by pro-Persian tyrants, a revolt against the Persian Empire, and a change to the Ephesian constitution which influenced him to believe that politics is conflictual. This viewpoint put him at odds with the less developed political awareness (awareness of the uniqueness of the *polis* and its *nomos*, and the need to defend it) of his fellow Ephesians. It is probable Heraclitus was at odds with his fellow Ephesians for their Mede-izing (Pro-Persian) tendencies. I have already made an analysis along these lines above.[153] His views on ethics and politics (particularly about the common and the role of law) or reactions to them would go on to influence thinkers from Democritus to the Stoics.

In the next chapter I will examine different interpretations of Heraclitus on religion and I will argue that they focus too much on his attitudes *toward* religion and not enough on what religion could have inspired in his thought.

[153] This pro-Hellenic bent may be supported by his association with Demeter; her intervention and Apollo's were seen as the most Pro-Hellene during the Persian Wars. Thus, his criticism of his fellow citizens can be seen as critique of the apparent unwillingness to think for themselves or to defend their *nomos* against one being imposed on them (i.e. they were conflict averse). This may explain why he was said to be more popular in the more politically conscious and pro-Hellenic Athens than he was in his home *polis*.

CHAPTER 2: INTERPRETING HERACLITUS ON RELIGION

One of the most interesting and controversial questions concerning Heraclitus' philosophy is what his views are on religion. Closely related is the question of what influence religion may have had on his other philosophical ideas. To paraphrase Mantas Adomenas, when we look at the ideas of Pre-Socratic thinkers we are looking at philosophy in its infancy and how it related to the important cultural traditions of that time.[154] If we want to understand how philosophy developed we must understand how it evolved out of a critique of and an attempt to understand these traditions. One question concerns the uniformity of these critiques. Did all early philosophers share the same goals and methods? As Adomenas explains

> Were all the early philosophic attempts characterised by emancipation from traditional piety, as the conventional opinion of scholars would have us believe? Or was there a more complex pattern in the relationship to traditional religion, represented by one of the most prominent proponents of the enterprise that had yet to define itself as 'philosophy'?[155]

In this Chapter I discuss both questions.

There are (roughly) three main lines of interpretation that previous commentators have adopted toward Heraclitus' views on religion.[156] First, I will briefly examine the three interpretations and then I will present my own alternative approach. As I will explain, my own view is that, far from seeking to "emancipate" his contemporaries from traditional religion, Heraclitus sought to *apply* the innovative ideas he found in that religion. His interpretation of popular Greek religion was *a source* of many of Heraclitus' philosophical ideas and methods.

I. Three Interpretations of Heraclitus on Religion

The first interpretation imagines Heraclitus as analogous to Enlightenment atheists like Voltaire. Thinkers, like Kahn, who support this view place emphasis on fragments like DK14, DK15

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[154] Mantas Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," *Phronesis* 44, no. 2 (1999): 88.

[155] Adomenas, 88.

[156] Most calls them "images." Glenn Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," *Rhizomata* 1, no. 2 (2013): 153, https://doi.org/10.1515/rhiz-2013-0007.

& DK5 (quoted below on pp 40 and 41), which seem to challenge or question certain existing religious practices. Kahn's reasoning seems to be that the apparent critique of mystical practices (especially those associated with Dionysos) amounts to a critique of all Greek religion. In other words, Heraclitus was a religious skeptic. Kahn states his view most forcefully in his commentary on DK14:

> Heraclitus is not an aristocrat or conservative in religious matters. He is a radical, an uncompromising rationalist, whose negative critique of the tradition is more extreme than that of Plato a century later. Plato breaks only with current beliefs about the gods; in matters of cult he follows the principle that custom is king. Not so Heraclitus. Despite his great respect for *nomos* as the legal order and moral cement of the community, in matters of piety and psychic destiny he denounces what is customary among men (*ta no mizomena*) as a tissue of folly and falsehood.[157]

Heraclitus, Kahn believes, was an early iconoclast.

The second interpretation is Glenn Most's. Most believes that Heraclitus is a kind of re-interpreter of Greek religion; his Heraclitus is a kind of early Philo of Alexandria. As Most puts it, "he seems in general to be applying his philosophical reason to the phenomenon of Greek religion with a fundamentally conservative intent, rejecting what he must, saving what he can by reinterpreting it."[158] On Most's view Heraclitus is not concerned with tearing down all of traditional Greek religion, instead "[h]e prefers to focus on the cults of the city and on established ritual and mystery practices, isolating elements that he takes to correspond to his own views and hinting at why and how they do so."[159] In other words a comment like (DK5) **They are purified in vain, because they are polluted** (*mianomenoi*) **by blood, just as if someone who had stepped into mud cleaned himself with mud** is not meant to damn the Dionysiac cult itself, but to make the reader think critically about the sensibleness of that "purification" practice.

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[157] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 263.

[158] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 166.

[159] Most, 164–65.

Whereas Most sees Heraclitus as a kind of philosophical interpreter of religion, a third interpretation presents Heraclitus as a thinker using philosophy to *reform* traditional Greek religion or at least how his contemporaries thought about it. The best example of this view is Mantas Adomenas'. Adomenas believes that Heraclitus' goal was not to tear down traditional institutions and beliefs, but to make his audience see that they were viewing them incorrectly. He sees Heraclitus as "an interpreter, who tries to discern the pattern inherent in the existing practices, and exploit it in the construction of his own philosophical theology."[160] For Adomenas, Heraclitus is mining religion for examples that illustrate points about the *logos* that the philosophically unlettered would not discern otherwise.

In what follows I am going to provide reasons why we should reject Kahn's and Most's interpretations of Heraclitus, while accepting the general thrust of Adomenas' approach as part (but *only* a part) of an approach that I will defend.

II. Kahn's View: Was Heraclitus a Religious Skeptic?

The view that Heraclitus was a religious skeptic or Enlightenment-style atheist centers on three fragments: DK5, DK14, & DK15:

> DK14: To whom does Heraclitus of Ephesus address his prophesies? To "**night-wanderers, Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates** (*mustai*)." It is to these that he prophesies "**the fire**" [cf. D84]. For "**they are initiated** (*mueisthai*) **impiously into the mysteries** (*musteria*) t**hat are recognized among men."**
> DK5: **They are purified in vain, because they are polluted** (*mainomenoi*) **by blood, just as if someone who had stepped into mud cleaned himself with mud: if any** [scil. other] **human noticed him doing this, he would think that he was mad** (*mainesthai*). **And they pray to these statues, just as if someone were to converse with houses, not knowing who the gods and heroes are.**
> DK15: **If it were not for Dionysus that they performed the procession and said the hymn to the shameful parts** (*aidoia*), **most shamefully** (*anaidestata*) **would they be acting; but Hades is the same as Dionysus, for whom they go mad** (*mainesthai*) **and celebrate maenadic rites.**

[160] Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 113.

For Kahn, these fragments reveal a "radical, an uncompromising rationalist."[161] Kahn's Heraclitus was not content rejecting the vague theology of the poets. On this view, the Ephesian also rejected the rites and cults intertwined with the *polis* that, also according to Kahn, Plato was content to leave be.

This interpretation is problematic. First, it sits poorly with Heraclitus' own invocation of religious language in a positive light both in these three fragments themselves as well as others. Let us look at these three fragments in greater detail. DK14 says that "they" (the groups listed earlier in the fragment) are initiated "**impiously into the mysteries that are recognized among men**." The mysteries themselves are not "impious"; the initiation is. Thus, it is far from obvious that he is criticizing the mysteries themselves.

Further, to recognize an *impious* action is to recognize that there is a *pious* way to do that same thing. If I criticize how someone throws a baseball, I imply that I think there is a *right* way to throw a baseball. Thus, Heraclitus' invocation of the idea of impiety suggests that he is not rejecting religious ideas entirely. He clearly believes in some notion of the divine; impiety is a violation *against* the divine and thus the charge itself assumes the *existence* of the divine.

A supporter of Kahn's position might argue that Heraclitus is merely using religious language to subvert it. He could be using it in a sarcastic or ironic way. But this position fails to account for Heraclitus' declaring that those who are initiated impiously deserve "**the fire**." That statement implies some sort of evaluation of the group. Recall that in DK66 Heraclitus writes: **When the fire has come upon all things, it will judge them and seize hold of them.** Fire in that fragment is a metaphor for justice and punishment. Hence Heraclitus is probably condemning this group and not using religious language ironically.

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[161] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 263.

Consequently, DK14 appears to be a comment from *within* the Greek religious tradition. It is does not say that this tradition is false or problematic. Rather, Heraclitus is attempting to cast a critical eye on certain behaviors that he believes are unworthy of that tradition.

We can make a similar analysis of DK5 and DK15. In DK5 an unspecified "they" are "purified in vain" because they are "polluted by blood." Here again Heraclitus is assuming a position from within the Greek religious tradition to criticize certain practitioners of it. As I will discuss below, Heraclitus was associated with the cult of Demeter at Eleusis. One of the few things that disqualified one from becoming an initiate of her Mysteries was the ritual pollution suffered by anyone who had committed murder.[162] It is reasonable to conclude that Heraclitus thought it was literal madness for someone to think they can be "purified" by blood. Impurity cannot make one pure.

Purification by blood is just as mad in his mind as praying to statue as if "**as if someone were to converse with houses.**" The statues *represent* gods and heroes, but the statues are not the gods and heroes themselves. To think otherwise is madness akin to believing a baby doll is a living child or talking to a house instead of the people who live within it.

It would be too easy to take this latter point too far and conclude that Heraclitus, like some modern Christian critic, is declaring Greek religion to be statue worship. Indeed, if DK15 were the only religion fragment we might be justified in concluding this. But this is a mistake. Consider the following fragments:

> DK24: **Gods and humans honor those men whom Ares has slain.**
> DK32: **One thing, what is wise: it does not want and does want to be called only by the name of Zeus.**
> DK53: **War is the father of all and the king of all, and has revealed that the ones are gods and the others humans, and has made the ones slaves and the others free.**

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[162] Helene P. Foley, ed., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretative Essays* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 66.

> DK62: **Immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the death of these, dying the life of those.**
> DK79: **A grown man is called puerile by a divinity, just as a child is by a grown man.**
> DK83: **The wisest human being will seem to be a monkey compared to a god in wisdom, beauty, and everything else.**
> DK100: **… the sun, which is the overseer and observer of these things [i.e. limits and periods], becomes the collaborator of the god who leads and is first, by limiting, judging, revealing, and illuminating the changes and seasons that bring all things**, according to Heraclitus.
> DK93: **The lord whose oracle is the one in Delphi neither speaks nor hides but gives signs.**
> DK94: **The sun will not overstep measures, otherwise, the Erinyes, Justice's helpers, will find it out.**

All these fragments use language concerning the gods or the divine. While some might be using "religious colloquialisms" – much like some people still say "A.D" even though they are not believing Christians – many are references to individual gods. DK93 and DK94 unquestionably refer to Apollo and the Furies, respectively and DK32 refers to Zeus by name.

More importantly, none of these fragments suggests a skeptical attitude toward (or rejection of) the gods mentioned. Rather, they use the gods as comparatives to humans (DK53, DK62, DK79, and DK83), as enforcers of norms or order (DK24, DK100, DK94), or as mysterious sources of wisdom (DK32, DK93). Much like DK5, DK14, and DK15 they suggest an engaged critical attitude, rather than an "uncompromising rationalist."

Apart from the consistency problems Kahn's interpretation causes, as Most has pointed out, it relies on a questionable generalization "from the individual ritual practices that Heraclitus discusses so as to arrive at a category of Greek religion as a whole."[163] There is simply no reason to motivate this move apart from a desire to see Heraclitus as a kind of Pre-Socratic Voltaire.[164] It may, in fact, reflect too strong a reliance on the Christian sources of the fragments, like Clement of

[163] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 154.

[164] Most, 154.

Alexandria. Clement selects quotations from Heraclitus to portray Greek religious practices as silly or corrupt. For example, here is DK14 in context:

> These are the secret mysteries of the Athenians; these Orpheus records. I shall produce the very words of Orpheus, that you may have the great authority on the mysteries himself, as evidence for this piece of turpitude:
>
> "Having thus spoken, she drew aside her garments,
> And showed all that shape of the body which it is improper to name, the growth of puberty;
> And with her own hand Baubo stripped herself under the breasts.
> Blandly then the goddess laughed and laughed in her mind,
> And received the glancing cup in which was the draught."
>
> And the following is the token of the Eleusinian mysteries: *I have fasted, I have drunk the cup; I have received from the box; having done, I put it into the basket, and out of the basket into the chest.* Fine sights truly, and becoming a goddess; mysteries worthy of the night, and flame, and the magnanimous or rather silly people of the Erechthidæ, and the other Greeks besides, "whom a fate they hope not for awaits after death." To whom does Heraclitus of Ephesus address his prophesies? To "**night-wanderers, Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates** (*mustai*)." It is to these that he prophesies "**the fire.**" For "**they are initiated** (*mueisthai*) **impiously into the mysteries** (*musteria***) that are recognized among men.**" [translation altered for consistency][165]

After declaring various Greek mystery traditions to be ludicrous and profane, Clement selects DK14 as authority that even a pagan Greek thought these practices were problematic. He assumes that Heraclitus' critique is of a piece with his own.

Kahn appears to take up Clement's approach even if he does not have Clement's motivation. He concludes that "Heraclitus' polemic is not directed against vulgar superstition, the cult of the uneducated masses, as some commentators suppose. The religion under attack is that of Pindar and Sophocles."[166] This is an understandable, if misguided, conclusion. In the fragments mentioned, and in a small number of other fragments, Heraclitus makes statements that taken literally and devoid of context could have shocked the religious sensibilities of his readers. Kahn takes the shocking nature

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[165] Clement of Alexandria, "Exhortation to the Heathen," in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, ed. Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1867).

[166] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 263.

of these fragments as evidence that Heraclitus wanted to do away with the entire edifice of Greek religion.

For example, consider DK96: **Corpses are more to be thrown out than manure.**[167] Ancient Greeks, like many cultures, had elaborate rituals and rules concerning the handling of human corpses. Thus, one way to interpret this fragment is as a direct attack on Greek funerary rites. This appears to be how Kahn takes it when he writes: "No utterance of Heraclitus is better calculated to offend the normal religious sensitivities of an ancient Greek than this contempt for the cult of the dead, as every reader of the Antigone will recognize. The shock effect of this aphorism made it one of the best known throughout antiquity."[168] While this is not the only possible interpretation of this fragment, it is the most popular. Kahn and others surmise that since Heraclitus appears to believe (from other fragments) that the *psyche* is the core element of the person, that the body is as useless as literal waste after death.[169] This is a plausible connection, but not the best interpretation available.

My alternative is that Heraclitus is trying to draw attention to the apparent conflict between funerary rites and the decay of human remains. Adomenas echoes my views when he argues that the fragment concerns the apparent conflict between putrefaction and veneration of the corpse. The Greeks lived in a Mediterranean climate, and a corpse would not have survived a showing for long without decay setting in. Adomenas thinks it is possible that the fragment may have been longer and represented another example of the unity of opposites: "The logical emphasis of the fragment may have been placed on the contradiction between this and traditional funeral practices. The surviving words may have constituted a first part of the fragment that would have run something like the

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[167] Josh Wilburn has suggested, and I tend to agree, that perhaps the anecdote that Heraclitus died covered in cow dung was inspired by this fragment.

[168] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 212.

[169] Kahn, 212; T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), 147.

following: 'Corpses are more to be thrown away than dung, and yet they are afforded various ritual honours / almost god-like veneration / sumptuous funerals *vel sim*.'"[170]

Another variation on this theme suggested by Adomenas is that Heraclitus may be calling attention to the paradoxical treatment of corpses within the religious tradition itself. Even though the tradition honors and venerates dead bodies, that same tradition declares that one is "polluted" by touching them.[171] Thus the tradition itself recognizes a kind of unity of opposites when it comes to corpses, which are treated as both sacred and polluted. After the post-Platonic devaluation of the body that became common in Western thought "it would not be surprising if the same sentiment were read into Heraclitus' fragment, simultaneously failing to notice its paradoxical content, and only its memorable opening was transmitted through quotations."[172]

Kahn, however, tacitly rejects this interpretation of DK96. For Kahn, this fragment can only mean a devaluation of the body that was shocking to the Greek religious tradition. Even assuming Kahn is correct, however, it underdetermines the conclusions he draws from it. In his commentary to DK14 he uses DK96 as evidence for his conclusion that Heraclitus launched an all-out attack on Greek religion.[173] As we have seen above it is questionable that DK114 itself suggests such an attack since in other places Heraclitus seems to appeal to aspects of that religious tradition. But it is even more questionable to connect the two fragments as Kahn does. At best Kahn's interpretation of DK96 suggest that Heraclitus had some heterodox ideas about corpses. If Kahn is right about DK14 as well, Heraclitus may also have had heterodox ideas about mystery religions. But there is a

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[170] Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 107.

[171] Adomenas, 262.

[172] Adomenas, 108.

[173] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 262. Josh Wilburn has commented that it's strange that Kahn characterizes Heraclitus as much more radical than Plato, given that Plato has Socrates express the same view of bodies in the *Phaedo*. This is a good point, but I think Kahn's view of "radicalism" is solely concerned with his *theological* interpretation of Heraclitus. His view that Heraclitus is more radical flows from his idea that Heraclitus, unlike Plato, rejected *more* of the Greek religious tradition.

difference between having heterodox ideas about a subject and rejecting that subject wholesale. Hesiod's view of the gods differed from Sophocles, Sophocles' views differ from Euripides', etc. Some of these differences were slight, e.g. between Hesiod and Sophocles. Some of these differences were great as between Sophocles and Euripides.[174] Yet it would be facile to suggest that these differences amounted to a rejection of the whole of traditional Greek religion.

Heterodoxy need not count as heresy. This is particularly true in a religious culture like that of the Greeks which had no centralized religious authority and no scriptural canon. True, the Greeks recognized crimes against religion. We need only think of one of the charges against Socrates. If Heraclitus was so much more heterodox than Plato, as Kahn claims, then why are there no anecdotes about his facing charges like Socrates? Surely such a radical view of religion would have made some ripple, at least, in the biographical tradition. Perhaps Ephesus was more permissive than Athens. Certainly, there is a case for this. Athens at the time of Socrates' trial was in a state of existential crisis. It had gone from hegemony to massive population decline, crushing naval losses, and civil unrest. Socrates was sympathetic to oligarchy and was the teacher of Critias (leader of the Thirty Tyrants) and the untrustworthy Alcibiades. Athens was in no mood to have its values questioned by such a character.

Comparatively, Heraclitus' Ephesus was only briefly under its own rule during the Ionian Revolt. Its Persian overlords had little interest in interfering in Greek or any other non-Persian religious affairs. One could argue that this was a much more permissive environment for religious heterodoxy than fourth century B.C.E. Athens. Heraclitus provides evidence that Ephesus was not entirely tolerant, however. For evidence, we need only look at another Heraclitean fragment (DK121):

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[174] Euripides' depiction of the gods is famously heterodox. He depicts them less as ordered arbiters of justice and more as brute forces of nature that man cannot comprehend.

> **All the adult Ephesians ought to hang themselves and to leave the city to beardless boys: for they exiled Hermodorus, the one man of them who mas most beneficial, saying, "Let there not be one man among us who is the most beneficial -- otherwise, may he be elsewhere among others."**

History does not record the reason for Hermodorus' exile, but there is a (probably spurious) tradition that Hermodorus went to Rome to help the decemvirs compose the famous Twelve Tables.[175] We can extrapolate that Hermodorus was some sort of legal reformer who was exiled because of his heterodox legal views. It is thus these views which Heraclitus thinks would have been beneficial to the city. Contextualized, Hermodorus thus resembles Socrates. Indeed, the tone of this fragment is very much like the tone of the *Apology*. Socrates tells the jurors that his inquiries are beneficial to the well-being of Athens. Despite this, he is punished.

Similarly, if Heraclitus' heresy or impiety was so great, he should have at least met the fate of Hermodorus. Heraclitus was from a clerical family. His words concerning the gods would have carried great weight. His religious writings would likely have drawn attention if they had been radical. After all, he did not hide *Peri Physeos*. He dedicated it to one of the most famous temples in the world. In a pre-printing world this was basically publication. Thus, I do not think it is persuasive to argue that we have overlooked a "radical" Heraclitus because of Ephesian permissiveness.

In summary, there simply is no compelling argument that Heraclitus was a radical religious skeptic. First, this interpretation seems to contradict several other fragments where Heraclitus is not so critical. Second, this interpretation appears to owe more to a reliance on the bias of our early Christian source of some of the fragments, Clement of Alexandria, and less on historical context. Third, the fragments to which Kahn appeals underdetermine his conclusions. Finally, as I will argue in the next chapter, contemporary religious ideas had a significant positive role in shaping Heraclitus'

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[175] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 178.

philosophy which suggests that he approved of at least some elements of the Greek religious tradition.

III. Most's View: Heraclitus as Philo of Alexandria

Where Kahn saw Heraclitus as a sort of religious skeptic, purging Greek religion of its irrational features, Glenn Most has a different view. Heraclitus, he argues neither offers a systematic theology of abstract gods, nor presents a polemic against existing theological ideas. Instead, his approach is one of "selection and accommodation."[176] Instead of setting himself up as an opponent of Greek religion, Heraclitus

> … seems to want to make us think critically about religion (and since he is Greek, it is about Greek religion that he wants to make us think critically), pointing out structures and paradoxes inherent in its religious practice and inviting us to reflect on them by attempting to develop conceptions of the gods, and of cults in their honor, that would be worthy of their divinity and of our belief in them.[177]

Thus, wherever possible he links the gods with traits that he considers laudable (i.e. justice, wisdom) and highlights problems with contemporary practices and beliefs where he thinks they are missing the mark.

Most's argument is brief, and his rejection of alternative views is cursory at best, but his argument looks something like the following. Unlike Xenophanes and Parmenides, who are concerned with divinity in general, Heraclitus seems to focus on specific religious practices.[178] Xenophanes was interested in the gods of the poets like Homer and Hesiod who are, in his view, too anthropomorphic and too immoral.[179] By contrast, Most argues, "[t]he gods that interest [Heraclitus] are not those of the poets but those of the city and the mysteries, and it is these that he

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[176] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 159.

[177] Most, 165.

[178] Most, 158.

[179] "Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods/ Everything that men find shameful and reprehensible—/ Stealing, adultery, and deceiving one another. "Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2009), 27, F6.

tries to set into relation with his philosophical views."[180] Where Heraclitus does concern himself with the nature of the gods, he is "performing a kind of philosophical allegoresis, translating characteristics into concepts within the terms of his philosophical system – and thus, as it were, saving (at least some of) the appearances of Greek religion."[181] Thus, Most concludes that Heraclitus is not a skeptic but "seems in general to be applying his philosophical reason to the phenomenon of Greek religion with a fundamentally conservative intent, rejecting what he must, saving what he can by reinterpreting it."[182] In short, Heraclitus' concern was not with theology, but religion.[183]

Although he does not mention him by name, Most's model of Heraclitus is strikingly like Philo of Alexandria.[184] Like Philo, Most's Heraclitus is interested in "saving the appearances" of Greek religion through reinterpretation of their meanings. *Peri Physeos* itself would, of course, provide these meanings. In other words, by giving Greek religion meanings consistent with Heraclitus' own philosophy, he hopes to save it from itself. It is hard to see how this does not make Heraclitus a kind of "reformer" and Most does not clearly explain why his view is categorically different from Adomenas'[185] even though he is critical of Adomenas' views and is responding to them in part. But even if we take Most at his word, his approach leaves much to be desired.

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[180] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 159. See for example DK5, DK14, and DK15.

[181] Most, 162. As he might be doing in DK32, DK51, and DK93.

[182] Most, 165.

[183] Credit goes to Josh Wilburn for this succinct formulation.

[184] Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish intellectual who lived during the first half of the first century B.C.E. One of his primary goals was to press philosophy into the service of Revelation. His most memorable tool to this end was the use of allegory to interpret Jewish scripture. While not excluding literal readings of some of the text, Philo argued that some scriptural narrative is comprised of "indications of character types which invite allegorical interpretation through the explanation of hidden meanings." In Genesis for example, God creates Eve from one of Adam's ribs. Philo circumvents the improbability of this story by suggesting "rib" is an allegory for Adam's cognitive capacities. In other cases, he uses etymology to "clarify" the meaning of the names of biblical characters. This technique for "saving the appearances" in Jewish scripture is analogous to what Most suggests that Heraclitus is doing for Greek religion. *See* Carlos Lévy, "Philo of Alexandria," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/philo/.

[185] A view I will consider in greater detail below.

Despite their faults, Adomenas'[186] views, although expressed earlier than Most's, present a credible alternative: that Heraclitus was using religious examples to *support* his philosophical views. Only one fragment, DK32, provides any kind of support for Most's approach: **One thing, what is wise: it does not want and does want to be called only by the name of Zeus.** Most notes that it the subject of the sentence is *to sophon* ("what is wise") and not Zeus. He suggests that although fragment assumes the existence of Zeus "at the same time he is being depersonalized, generalized, identified with an abstract category of which he is the supreme representative."[187] Thus, argues Most, humanity is only partially correct about Zeus. They are right to call him Zeus, but this is a partial truth. The "wise" is greater than just the entity picked out by the name "Zeus."

Even if Most is correct about this fragment, it is plainly compatible with Adomenas' views. In Adomenas' essay he writes, citing DK32 *inter alia*, that "[o]ne must be aware, however, that for Heraclitus the ultimate principle of reality transcends deities involved in the ritual and cult of the traditional religion."[188] While the ultimate truth transcends the traditional usage of the gods of cult and tradition "'[m]ortals' and 'immortals' (fr. 62), 'men' and 'gods' become pairs of opposites in the context of overall unifying structure that lies beyond the division into 'human' and 'divine.'"[189] Hence Adomenas sees DK32 as consistent with his views.

Indeed, Most's approach to this fragment fits neatly into *my* framework in this essay, which on this point doesn't stray far from Adomenas'. If I am correct that Heraclitus' historical context (including popular religion) influenced his philosophical method and views, a fragment like DK32 is only to be expected. This is especially true of the influence that mystery religion had on Heraclitus which I shall discuss in the next chapter. On my view, in DK32, Heraclitus is announcing that there

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[186] Again, see Section C below.

[187] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 163.

[188] Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 111.

[189] Adomenas, 111.

is an exoteric and esoteric truth about Zeus. The "exoteric" truth is that he is the Zeus of myth, powerful and promiscuous. The "esoteric" truth, analogous to the experience of someone fully initiated in the Mysteries, is that Zeus is also "what is wise." Calling that entity "Zeus" is not wrong; it is merely the partial knowledge of the un-initiated.

A second problem with Most's approach is that contrary to his claim that Heraclitus is "rejecting what he must" it is not clear that Heraclitus is truly "rejecting" anything in popular religion. I have already discussed at length why it is problematic to conclude from DK5, DK14, and DK15, that Heraclitus is "rejecting" mystery religion. Indeed, his overwhelming approach appears to be a "rejection" of thinkers and practitioners rather than practices themselves. Recall individual thinkers like Pythagoras, Hesiod and Xenophanes that he singles out for scorn. Also recall groups he seems to dislike, like his fellow Ephesians, people who mindlessly follow the poets, or people who profess to have their own private (as opposed to common) understanding. His worry is not that there is no subject to understand, but merely some people are terrible at understanding it.

Finally, I think Most's approach misses what is interesting about sorting out Heraclitus' relationship to popular religion. Adomenas puts the matter well:

> Why should the way Heraclitus related to the practices and beliefs current in the popular religion of his time be so important? At stake is, I propose, the relationship between philosophy in *statu nascendi* and one of the more important aspects of the Greek cultural tradition. Were all the early philosophic attempts characterised by emancipation from traditional piety, as the conventional opinion of scholars would have us believe? Or was there a more complex pattern in the relationship to traditional religion, represented by one of the most prominent proponents of the enterprise that had yet to define itself as 'philosophy'?[190]

Most's view is trapped by the frame created by previous scholars of an antagonism between religion and philosophy, where philosophy plays the role of emancipator. Although he claims that Heraclitus acts with a "conservative" intent, he still assumes that Heraclitus is trying to make popular religion

[190] Adomenas, 88.

conform wherever possible to his philosophy. This assumption reveals the shadow cast by Socrates' trial for blasphemy and treason that occurred long after Heraclitus lived. We cannot assume that this antagonism between religion and philosophy would have existed for Heraclitus too.

To summarize, I do not agree with Most that Heraclitus' intent was to make Greek religion conform to his philosophy. Heraclitus was not simply trying to save the acceptable bits of Greek religion through "quasi-allegoresis."[191] Although in some ways this view is less radical than Kahn's suggestion that Heraclitus is rejecting conventional Greek religion altogether it simply goes far beyond and even contradicts our evidence.

IV. Adomenas' View: Was Heraclitus a Religious Reformer?

A third view of Heraclitus is that he was a religious reformer. The exemplar of this view is Mantas Adomenas. In his article "Heraclitus on Religion" he challenges the prevailing view of Heraclitus as a skeptic of traditional religion who proposes a rationalist theology to replace it. Adomenas credits the genesis of this view to the assumption that Heraclitus was a successor to the ideas of Xenophanes. An assumption that he rejects in favor of a more complicated view of Heraclitus that sees him as a sort of religious reformer instead of a rationalist theologian.

After dispensing with the idea that Heraclitus was a follower or student of Xenophanes[192], Admoenas examines the controversial fragments (DK14 & DK15 especially) to see what better

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[191] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 165.

[192] This connection between Heraclitus and Xenophanes is understandable, as some of our ancient sources made it as well. Diogenes Laertius, after declaring that Heraclitus was self-taught relates the opposing view of some who say, "that he had been a pupil of Xenophanes, as we learn from Sotion, who also tells us that Ariston in his book *On Heraclitus* declares that he was cured of the dropsy and died of another disease." Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 2:413. We should not, however, give much weight too this view. First, Diogenes is clearly mentioning this view for completeness as he has already concluded that Heraclitus was too arrogant to be anybody else's pupil. In other words, Diogenes does not seem to believe it himself. Second, Diogenes' inclusion of the full context—a description of another book with a dubious tale about Heraclitus' death—is a strong indication that the original source material was hostile to Heraclitus. Claiming that a thinker had an embarrassing death or was associated with figures that might be called disreputable, like the apparent "atheism" of Xenophanes, were ways of undermining a thinker's credibility. Add to this the prevalence of spurious connections between thinkers in ancient intellectual biography, and we have ample reason to doubt that Xenophanes was Heraclitus' teacher.

sense he can make of them. Primarily he thinks that Heraclitus is selecting religious practices that exemplify the unity of opposites. To that end, Adomenas first examines the controversial DK14 and DK15.

Adomenas compares the language of impiety in DK14 (i.e. **they are initiated impiously into the mysteries that are recognized among men**) to the pagan apologetics of Iambilichus in the *Mysteries of the Egyptians*.[193] Iambilichus explains that the phalli used in obscene rights should be seen as allegories for the process of generation. Further, he argues that obscene rituals can be cathartic for "just as the attempt to constrain passions intensifies them, so, to an equal degree, short and limited indulgence appeases, purifies the passions and reduces their strength."[194] It is after this passage that he cites Heraclitus DK68: "Heraclitus calls them [i.e. obscene rituals and hymns] **cures**." If we combine this reference with D58 (**Doctors**, Heraclitus says, **cutting, cauterizing**, badly mistreating their patients in every way, **complain that they do not receive an adequate payment from their patients-- and are producing the same effects**, benefits and diseases) Adomenas argues, we can recontextualize DK14. Just as doctors paradoxically inflict the pain of surgery to remove the pain of disease, obscene rituals which appear impious paradoxically "cure" something wrong with the ritual practitioner.[195] Adomenas is arguing that DK14, like DK58, is an example where Heraclitus is highlighting the "unity of opposites."

Following this line of reasoning, Adomenas cleverly interprets DK15 (**If it were not for Dionysus that they performed the procession and said the hymn to the shameful parts…**) as

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More important is Adomenas' point that Heraclitus explicitly criticizes Xenophanes in DK40: Much learning does not teach intelligence: for otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and Xenophanes and Hecataeus. This is the only place in the fragments that mentions Xenophanes. Heraclitus uses that space to place him among thinkers that are his favorite targets: Pythagoras and Hesiod. Thus, Heraclitus must believe Xenophanes' "intelligence" is particularly worthy of scorn. *See* Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 88.

[193] Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 91.

[194] Adomenas, 91.

[195] Adomenas, 92.

another example of Heraclitus' doctrine. He argues that the identification of Hades and Dionysos in the latter half of the fragment is grounded in Greek representations of the latter god. Dionysos the god of wine and vitality is also linked with death.[196] His birth occurs after the death of his mortal mother Semele who was turned to ash when she saw Zeus in all his glory. Another version has him as Zagreus, the son of Zeus and Persephone who was torn apart by Titans at the instigation of Hera. Finally, Dionysos' own mystery cult was associated with secrets of the afterlife. Thus, the identification of Dionysos (life) and Hades (death) would be another example of the unity of opposites found in the world.

On a casual reading of DK15, Heraclitus is criticizing the Dionysiac procession and hymn as shameful things that society gives a pass because they are religious rituals. On Adomenas' view, there is no criticism at all. Instead, Heraclitus is telling us that the ritual itself is an example of the unity of opposites, and that is what makes it sacred. So the fragment is a kind of doubling of the unity of opposites. First Hades (death) and Dionysos (life) are two sides of the same coin. Second the "shameful" acts are also sacred. The unity of the first pair of opposites explains the unity of the second pair.

Adomenas applies his interpretive framework to other fragments on religion. DK5: **They are purified in vain, because they are polluted** (*mianomenoi*) **by blood, just as if someone who had stepped into mud cleaned himself with mud**… The ritual in question is probably the "Apollonian ritual of purification from murder – a piglet was killed over the murderer's head, so that the blood would drip onto his head and hands."[197] The idea behind the ritual appears to be something like sympathetic magic.[198] Since the person was polluted by human blood, they must

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[196] Adomenas, 93.

[197] Adomenas, 95.

[198] A term coined by Frazer in The Golden Bough, sympathetic magic is the assumption that "things act on each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may

symbolically experience that pollution again to remove the *miasma*. This fragment is thus another example of the unity of opposites because it shows that blood is paradoxically both polluting and purifying.[199]

Adomenas continues in this vein toward his conclusion. Obviously, he disagrees with Kahn and others that Heraclitus was a kind of skeptic or critic of religion. Instead, Adomenas concludes that Heraclitus saw in religion a fertile ground for examples of his doctrine of the unity of opposites. In other words, Adomenas' Heraclitus ventures to give a somewhat systematic account of religion to use that account as further justification for his philosophical views. That is to say, "Heraclitus treats religious practices in a way similar to his treatment of ethics and politics, which he also tries to incorporate into his highly integrated vision of reality, whereby a universal principle (identical with the content of the logos that Heraclitus announces) governs both the cosmos and human society."[200]

To summarize, there is much to be said in favor of Adomenas' views on the issue. Admomes (although he rejects the label) presents Heraclitus as a kind of reformer who wants to use his philosophy to change common views of religion and use religion as a source of examples in his philosophy. In the main, I think Adomenas is broadly correct. As I argued in Section I, the idea that Heraclitus was a religious skeptic is unsustainable. Further, Adomenas is in safe territory extending the unity of opposites doctrine to cover the controversial religious fragments. If anything can be said to be a main theme in Heraclitus, it is the unity of opposites. My only concern is that since we do not have his complete work, we do not know if the unity of opposite theme ran throughout the complete work or if it was confined to the fragments that have survived.. Thus, while Adomenas' interpretation is supported by an approach that favors a presupposition of "thematic unity" to *De*

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conceive as a kind of invisible ether." James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion*, 2003, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3623?msg=welcome_stranger#chapter3.

[199] Adomenas, "Heraclitus on Religion," 98. Adomenas compares the fragment to DK61: **The sea, the purest water and the foulest: for fish it is drinkable and life-giving, but for humans undrinkable and deadly.**

[200] Adomenas, 109.

Physeos, other equally plausible presuppositions undermine that support. Most importantly, however, in focusing on how Heraclitus *used* religion to illustrate his philosophical ideas, I believe that Adomenas misses how religion *influenced* what those ideas were in the first place. I shall discuss this latter issue in greater detail in the next chapter.

V. My View

My own approach makes the reasonable assumption that Heraclitus would have been influenced by his historical milieu and expands from there. We know that Heraclitus was a member of a priestly caste in Ephesus that was connected to the Eleusinian Mysteries. While it is possible that someone with this background would have rejected all inherited tradition, it is not likely, and drawing that conclusion would require meeting a relatively high burden of proof that is not met in this case. The only "evidence" that we have that he rejected it relies on a controversial reading of three fragments (DK5, DK14, & DK15). On the other hand, the evidence that this tradition *positively influenced* him is scattered throughout the fragments.[201] It is thus much more probable that Heraclitus was inspired by that tradition, rather than actively seeking to undermine it. [202]

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[201] On this see sections II and III below.

[202] Although he was connected to the Eleusinian Mysteries through his pedigree, I do not think this view *requires* that Heraclitus went to Eleusis. Heraclitus was from a priestly family associated with the Mysteries and my argument relies on the basic knowledge even uninitiated Greeks had of them. They actual mystery experience itself was secret. We have nothing but speculation about it by modern parties and hostile ancient parties. Further, it does not matter for my view that Heraclitus was specifically committed to the Eleusinian Mysteries rather than some other set, like the mysteries of Orpheus. As an educated Greek, the Eleusinian Mysteries could have influenced Heraclitus regardless.

Another concern is the debate about the alleged "Orphic" influence on Heraclitus. The Orphic vs. Eleusinian question is too is a tricky question to answer given the state of historical documentation about mystery cults. We have documents that claim to lay out Orphic doctrine. We do not have something analogous to the Derveni papyrus for the Eleusinian Mysteries. Such documents, in fact, would probably have been illegal. Thus, I can only show how "distinctively" Eleusinian the critique might be by showing that it is not Orphic. Insofar as he even mentions Dionysos, as we have seen above he is not clearly positive. Further, the only direct evidence linking Heraclitus to a mystery cult at all is to Eleusinian Demeter and not Orphic Dionysos. While it is true that Heraclitus writes in a cryptic manner similar to the Orphic writers and shares an interest in the unity of opposites, neither feature was solely associated with Orphic writers. We shall see in greater detail below that cryptic writing and ambiguity was also a key feature of the religion surrounding Apollo, which was another clear influence on Heraclitus. Further, as Nicholas Rescher has shown, the "development and elaboration of a theory of opposites" was a hallmark of early Greek philosophy. Nicholas Rescher, "Contrastive Opposition in Early Greek Philosophy," in *Cosmos and Logos: Studies in Greek Philosophy* (Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 33. That Heraclitus had a theory that is similar to the Orphic, on our current evidence means little more than that: similarity.

For example, by providing some historical context we can generate a plausible alternative to Most's view of DK5, DK14, and DK15 that makes them more harmonious with the conventional religious assumptions found in the other fragments. DK5, DK14, & DK15 share a common theme of impurity and madness in religious practices. Like most mysteries, those of Eleusinian Demeter require that the initiate be pure in some way. Unlike these other practices, Demeter's worship was bloodless. Both the sacrifices to the goddess and the *mystai* themselves were consider impure if they were bloody in some way. For example, the *mystai* were required to declare that they did not have "impure hands" (i.e. that they had not committed murder). But they were also prohibited from eating foods associated with blood and death. Pomegranates, associated with blood and death because of their red juice and their role in the myth of Demeter and Persephone, were explicitly forbidden.[203] Dionysus' own mysteries and the religious practices of the Magi[204] were both bloodier. It is thus plausible that the fragments in question were written from the perspective of an initiate into Demeter's mysteries.

From the perspective of one of Demeter's initiated, the focus on blood and madness is these other practices is impious and contradictory. Thus, in DK5 is literally madness (*mainesthai*) to think that by being "**polluted** (*mainomenoi*) **by blood**" used in religious rituals that one can become purified. It is just as mad as praying to a statue as if it were the home of a god, instead of a mere representation of a god.

DK15 is more puzzling (**If it were not for Dionysus that they performed the procession and said the hymn to the shameful parts** (*aidoia*), **most shamefully** (*anaidestata*) **would they be acting; but Hades is the same as Dionysus, for whom they go mad** (*mainesthai*) **and celebrate maenadic rites)**. There is a clear pun between "shameful parts" (*aidoia*), shameful acts (*anaidestata*),

[203] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 56–57.

[204] Markham J. Geller, *Ancient Babylonian Medicine: Theory and Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 128.

and Hades (*Aides*)[205] but apart from this wordplay Heraclitus' intent is murky. Does he mean to criticize the procession and hymn (Kahn) or point out the unity of opposites inherent in them (Adomenas)? Most suggests that Heraclitus is making "a connection in re: if the Dionysus of the mysteries has power in the Underworld, then must he not be ruler there, and in this sense correlated with Hades or ultimately even identical with him?"[206]

This is a plausible interpretation, but if I am correct about the Eleusinian bent of these fragments, we can take this further. The chief antagonist of the Demeter myth is Hades. It is Hades, lord of death, who causes the goddess' bereavement; it is thus over Hades that Demeter is ultimately (partially) victorious over at the end of the *Homeric Hymn*. Indeed, in the *Homeric Hymn* Persephone was said to have been captured by Hades at a plain called Nysa.[207] We do not know where this Nysa was supposed to be, but it is also the name given to the place Dionysos was born in his own *Homeric Hymn*.[208] This coincidence between the birthplace of Dionysos, and the spot where Persephone was abducted, surely caught the attention of the pattern-loving Heraclitus. Indeed, Dionysos himself was connected to the Mysteries at Eleusis where he is identified with Iakkhos, the torchbearer *daimon* that lead the procession of the initiates.[209]

Accordingly, Heraclitus' comment means that the initiates into the Dionysian mysteries are, unbeknownst to them, worshipping a god of death. By calling the object of their worship "Dionysus" society gives them a pass for this "shameful" behavior. Their god is not truly as they think he is. This is like the maneuver that he makes in DK32: **One thing, what is wise: it does not**

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[205] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 162.

[206] Most, 162.

[207] Susan C. Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns* (Hackett Publishing, 2012), 34.

[208] Shelmerdine, 28.

[209] Xavier Riu, *Dionysism and Comedy* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 109–11.

want and does want to be called only by the name of Zeus.[210] Here again Heraclitus seems to be trying to point to what he believes is the true nature of the gods. Most points out the most salient implicit feature of this fragment: "Zeus is here being revered not, as usual in Greek culture, for his power, but for his wisdom."[211] This suggests the first part of the clause after the colon (i.e. "**it does not want … to be called only by the name of Zeus**"). It does not want to be called *only* by the name of Zeus because "Zeus" is typically associated with power and not wisdom. The second half of that clause (i.e. **does want to be called … by the name of Zeus**) suggest that the name "Zeus" is at least a partially correct identifier of the god in question. Most writes, and this is one point on which I agree with him, that Heraclitus seems to be saying that "the understanding of this divinity established in Greek religion is only partially correct. Humans understand their god in part indeed, but only in part: its own understanding and self- understanding is more encompassing."[212]

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing, we can conclude the following about the alternative interpretations. First, Heraclitus was not a rationalist skeptic who rejected Greek religion wholesale. The conclusion that he was some sort of skeptic was based on his a scant few fragments and a spurious association with Xenophanes. Second, Most's view which casts Heraclitus in the role of an early Philo of Alexandria is limited by an uncomplicated view of the relationship between religion and philosophy. He tacitly accepts the anachronistic frame that philosophy was "outside" of religious thought and that popular religion could be made to conform with it. Third, while the ideas that Heraclitus was a reformer who sought to bring popular religion in line with his doctrine of the unity of opposites is plausible and has some truth to it, it is only a partial account. This view neglects what I see as the

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[210] As with other Heraclitean fragments DK32 is ambiguous. It is also possible that the *only* applies to the first part of the fragment as in "the one *and only* wise thing does and does not want to be called by the name of Zeus."

[211] Most, "Heraclitus on Religion," 163.

[212] Most, 163.

plain influence of popular religion on that very philosophy. Hence, it errs in making the relationship between philosophy and religion in that early period overly simple. It assumes that the philosophical ideas came *first*, and *then* he turned to religion to support them.

Instead, it makes more sense to see Heraclitus as critically examining popular religion from *inside* the tradition rather than outside of it. The fragments that, out of context, appear to be takedowns of religious practices are more likely cautions to his readers to think critically about prevailing religious ideas; particularly those concerning practices connected to the life of the *polis* like the Mysteries. Indeed, I believe that his inspiration for this sort of critical engagement from within a tradition was inspired by and modelled on religious practices surrounding the worship of Demeter and Apollo. Examining this inspiration is the goal of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: FROM MYTHOS TO LOGOS: GREEK RELIGION IN THE FORMATION OF HERACLITUS' PHILOSOPHY

In the last chapter, I discussed various interpretations of Heraclitus' relationship to religion and how they affect our understanding of the fragments. I also presented my own view, which posits that Heraclitus was not merely using religious examples as a target for critique or reform, or as a resource to teach his philosophy, but as a source of and inspiration for many of his ideas. To see this point, we must understand the religious background of the world Heraclitus lived in.

Accordingly, to understand this background, I will spend section I of this chapter briefly examining the Mysteries. That done, in the remaining subsections I will examine how the Mysteries interacted with the ideas of Plato and Heraclitus and I will examine Heraclitus further to draw out how some of his philosophical ideas are connected to the Mysteries. The discussion of Plato serves two purposes. First, it is relatively uncontroversial that Plato was influenced by the Mysteries and thus he provides a good model for understanding how this aspect of Greek religion interacted with philosophy. Second, I believe that Plato was influenced by Heraclitus and that some of this influence is detectable in the way that Plato uses the Mysteries as a philosophical resource for his own ideas. Finally, in section II I will discuss the influence and connections between Heraclitus' ideas and the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

I. The Eleusinian Mysteries and Philosophy

In this section I will examine the influence that I believe Demeter's mysteries had on Heraclitus' philosophical ideas and methods. First, I will provide the necessary historical context. What were the Eleusinian Mysteries? What practices were associated with them? How did these practices affect the initiated? Second, I will use this context to tease out how the Mysteries may have shaped what some philosophers wrote. This will begin with an examination of the use of ideas from the Mysteries found in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. Having established this, I will examine

how the idea of a transformative, collective experience changing an initiate's perception of the world is crucial to understanding a thread that runs through many of Heraclitus' fragments.

To see why we should look to the Mysteries for help understanding Heraclitus, we need only the prod of our ancient sources. Toward the end of his *Life of Heraclitus*, Diogenes Laertius recounts an epigram concerning the difficulty of understanding Heraclitus. One of these epigrams runs as follows:

> 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 (*skotos*) is there and darkness devoid of light. But if an initiate (*mystes*) be your guide, the path shines brighter than sunlight.[213]

This epigram makes a plain comparison between the reader seeking to understand Heraclitus' book and the religious supplicant seeking to understand a religious mystery. Put even more simply, the epigram argues that the book is only obscure (*skotos*) to the uninitiated.

But what did it mean to be "initiated" and "uninitiated" in the world that Heraclitus lived? What was a religious mystery and how did it differ from or connect with myth? We must answer these questions to understand how insightful this epigram is. But to answer this question we must lay out what we know about mystery religion in general and the Eleusinian Mysteries that Heraclitus was associated with. As a member of a family entitled to call themselves *basileis* of Ephesus, Heraclitus' family played a similar role to the priestly families of Athens associated with Demeter's Mysteries.

A. A Brief Examination of the Eleusinian Mysteries

Until Christianity came to dominate Europe, the ancient world was awash in religious devotees to various "mysteries." Mysteries (*mystēria*) were "rituals of a secret nature … which invited the members of a certain group, often very widely defined, to participate and thus be 'initiated'

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[213] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bk. 9.16.

(*myeisthai*, *teleisthai*)."[214] The purpose of these secret rituals varied, but all offered benefits to the initiated in this life or after death and a powerful religious experience that may have allowed "the initiate the sense of a closer relationship with the divine and a new understanding of familiar myths and rituals."[215] Mystery cults were a supplement to, not a replacement of Greek religious practices, and typically were integrated with the web of politics and religion that pervaded the *polis*.[216]

Dating back to the seventh century B.C.E. and dedicated to the goddesses Demeter and Persephone/Kore, the Eleusinian Mysteries were the oldest and most respected in the ancient Mediterranean world.[217] They were also the most inclusive of the mysteries since "[a]t least by the classical period (480 - 323 B.C.E.), the Mysteries were open to all persons who spoke Greek and had not committed murder: male or female, slave or free, Greek or Greek-speaking foreigner."[218] As discussed in the previous chapter, it is probable that Heraclitus' family were hereditary priests of Demeter.

The Eleusinian Mysteries had two stages of initiation: "The first stage of initiation was called *myêsis*; a *mystês* (pl. *mystai*) is one who closes his eyes and/or keeps his mouth shut." [219] This likely referred both to the ignorance of initiands (those being initiated for the first time), and the duty to keep the details of the ritual secret from others. The second and "final stage is described as *epopteia*; the *epoptês* is one who sees.[220] These *epooptai* "were those who had already been initiated in past years

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214 Emily Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion: A Sourcebook*, 1 edition (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 311.

215 Kearns, 311.

216 Kearns, 312. In Athens for example, the Eleusinian Mysteries were tightly bound-up in the way that the city saw itself. This is why it was illegal to "profane they Mysteries" as Alcibiades was accused of. Frisbee C. C. Sheffield, *Plato: The Symposium* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), viii.

217 Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 312; Michael B. Cosmopoulos, *Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 165.

218 Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 66. The only potential bar was the cost of being initiated. Fifteen drachmas were the equivalent to about ten days' wages in the fourth century.

219 Foley, 66.

220 Or perhaps "watchers."

and returned to witness the rites again."[221] The initiands … were individually sponsored and directed by initiates called *mystagogoi*, or leaders of the *mystai*."[222]

The first day of the Greater Mysteries was the fifteenth of Boedrimion (September/October). On that day, "the *mystai*, or initiands, gathered at the Stoa Poikilê in the Agora" where they were reminded that "those impure in hands or incomprehensible in speech" (that is, murderers or barbarians who did not speak Greek) should not participate."[223] After purifying themselves in the sea, sacrificing a piglet to the goddess, they joined the procession to Eleusis. In the procession, priestesses carried the boxes (*kistai*) containing the sacred objects (*hiera*). The procession proceeded over a bridge that spanned the boundary between Athens and Eleusis whereupon "masked participants made obscene gestures and jokes as the *mystai* passed by. The final stages of the walk would have been completed after dark and by torch-light."[224]

The next day the *mystai* were led to the Telesterion, the hall where the Mysteries took place. This building deviated from standard Greek temples and could accommodate several thousand people at a time.[225] The ceremony "took place in darkness until a great light shone when the Anaktoron [an inner chamber of the Telesterion] was opened and the hierophant [lit. "revealer of sacred things"] appeared."[226] At some point there was a "sacred encounter" between the priestess and the hierophant, and the latter would reveal the *hiera* to the *mystai*.[227] We do not know what the *mystai* saw or any details of the initiation, but the Christian writer Clement of Alexandria reports that the password (*synthema*) that proved one was an initiate was as follows: "I fasted, I drank the *kykeôn*

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[221] Nancy Evans, "Diotima and Demeter as Mystagogues in Plato's Symposium," *Hypatia* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 2006): 6.

[222] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 66.

[223] Foley, 67.

[224] Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns*, 30. Obscene gestures and jokes (or *aischrologia*) was also a feature of the rituals surrounding the *Thesmophoria*, a major festival dedicated to Demeter.

[225] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

[226] Foley, 68.

[227] Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns*, 30.

(a drink of barley, water, and herbs), I have taken from the chest (*kistê*), I worked, and deposited in the basket (*kalathos*) and from the basket into the chest"[228]

Numerous ancient reports claim that the experience was transformative in some way. An ancient rhetorician offers a description of the experience "I came out of the mystery hall feeling like a stranger to myself.' (Sopatros Rhetores Graeci VIII: 114—15)"[229] According to Plutarch, the *epoptes* is "set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet."[230] Aristotle, in his inimitable way, "emphasized that the initiate does not learn (*mathein*) something but is made to experience (*pathein*) the Mysteries and change his or her state of mind (fr. 15 = Synesius Dion 10 p.48a)."[231]

The Mysteries traced their origin to the myth recounted in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (ca. 675 – 625 B.C.E.)[232]. This myth describes the abduction of Demeter's daughter Persephone by Hades (lord of the underworld) and Demeter's subsequent journey to the Attic city of Eleusis. In her grief, she searches the world for her daughter. Disguised as an old woman Doso ("I give"), she comes to Eleusis where she meets the daughters of King Keleos and Queen Metaneira. Kallidikê ("beautiful justice") tells Doso that she may come be the caretaker for their only brother Demophoön.[233] Doso attempts to make the infant an immortal by a secret ritual that involves placing him in a fire. Metaneira discovers this ritual, and misunderstanding its purpose, interrupts it. Following the revelation that Doso is the goddess Demeter, the Eleusinians build her a temple, within which she hides herself from the world. As a result, agriculture all over the world begins to

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[228] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 68. See *Protreptikos* 2.21.2.

[229] Foley, 69.

[230] Foley, 70.

[231] Foley, 69.

[232] Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns*, 29.

[233] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 9–10.

suffer. Without agriculture, mortals begin to die and have nothing to sacrifice to the gods. Zeus relents and sends Hermes to bring Persephone back to her mother. Unfortunately, Persephone had eaten a pomegranate seed given to her by Hades, ensuring she would have to return to the land of the dead for one-third of the year. In response, Demeter restored fertility to the land and gave the Mysteries to mankind:

> She went to the kings [*basileusi*] who administer law,
> Tiptolemos and Keleos, leader of the people, and revealed
> the conduct of her rites and taught her Mysteries to all of them,
> holy rites that are not to be transgressed, nor pried into,
> nor divulged. For a great awe of the gods stops the voice.
> Blessed is the mortal on earth who has seen these rites,
> But the uninitiate [*ateles*] who has no share in them never
> Has the same lot once dead in the dreary darkness.[234]

The *Hymn*, like the Mysteries themselves, is overtly Panhellenic in a way that most archaic Greek poetry was not.[235] Versions of the myth outside the *Hymn*, are more Athenocentric. In these versions, the goddess teaches not only the mysteries, but agriculture itself, to the Attic people.[236] It was this (probably later) version of the myth that Isocrates refers to in *Panegyricus* 28 when he claims that Demeter

> …gave two gifts to Athens that are, in fact, our two most important possessions: the fruits of the earth that have allowed us to live civilized lives and the celebration of the mystery rites that grant to those who share in them glad hopes about the end of their life and about eternity.[237]

Indeed, the popularity of this, the most egalitarian[238] of Greek religious rites, justifies the orator's grandiloquence. If you lived in the Grecophone world from the Eight Century B.C.E. to the Fourth Century C.E. you knew of the Mysteries. Accordingly, as I have argued Heraclitus certainly knew of

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[234] Foley, 26.

[235] Foley, 178.

[236] Foley, 99–100.

[237] Terry L. Papillon, trans., *Isocrates II*, The Oratory of Classical Greece 7 (University of Texas Press, 2010), 62.

[238] Testimonia report that women, slaves, foreigners, and even children attended. Evans, "Diotima and Demeter," 6.

them.[239] Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, Heraclitus' family's status was based partly on its claimed links to the Mysteries and Athens' mythical background. As a Greek and as a member of a family entitled to call themselves *basileis* (lit. "king" but could also denote priests like the *archon basilieus* of Athens)[240], Heraclitus could not have avoided the influence of the Mysteries.

B. Mortality and Immortality in the work of Plato and Heraclitus

Before we examine Heraclitus himself, let us look at Plato and his use of the Mysteries in his own work. As I said in the introduction an examination of the interaction between Plato's ideas and the Mysteries is useful for two reasons. First, since the connection between Plato and the Mysteries it is fairly well-established, he provides an excellent model for examining their influence of philosophy. Second, and more importantly, I believe that Heraclitus influenced Plato and that some of that influence may be in the way Plato used the Mysteries as a philosophical resource. The clearest piece of evidence that Plato was influenced by Heraclitus is Plato's use of the idea of the unity of opposites in Erixymachus' and Diotima's speeches. The latter speech not only uses this Heraclitean idea but also provides a connection to the Mysteries.

Plato makes interesting use of the Mysteries in two of his works. First, there is the relatively brief but interesting metaphorical use in the *Phaedrus* and second, there is the more extensive use of the Mysteries as a model in the *Symposium*. First, let us look at the *Phaedrus*.

1. Phaedrus

During Socrates' second speech in the *Phaedrus*, he begins discussing the "madness" of the lover "who when he sees beauty on earth, remembering the true beauty, feels his wings growing and

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[239] Indeed, he makes explicit reference to mysteries in DK14: "To whom does Heraclitus of Ephesus address his prophesies? To **night-wanderers, Magi, Bacchants, Maenads, and initiates** (*mustai*). It is to these that he prophesies **the fire** [cf. D84]. For **they are initiated** (*mueisthai*) **impiously into the mysteries** (*musteria*) **that are recognized among men.**"

[240] An *archon basileus* was in charge of the state sacrifices. The *basileis* of Ephesus (i.e. Heraclitus' family) had similar duties and perks.

longs to stretch them for an upward flight."[241] Although he cannot fly there, the experience teaches him to neglect things of this world and recall the "things that are" (*ta onta*).[242] Recollection of these "thing that are" is described in terms that explicitly evoke the experience of the Mysteries. The recollector is

> …stricken with amazement and can no longer control themselves … because they cannot clearly perceive. … But at that former time they saw beauty shining in brightness, when, with a blessed company …they saw the blessed sight and vision and were initiated [*teleton*] into that which is rightly called the most blessed of mysteries, which we celebrated in a state of perfection … not entombed in this which we carry about us and call the body.[243]

Philosophical insight is thus analogous to the experience of an initiate to the Mysteries. Like the initiates gathered in the dark Telesterion, the recollector "in blessed company" is shown something that transcends his or her everyday existence. The initiate is let into the company of those who know the esoteric truth about Demeter beyond the exoteric truth in myth. The recollector remembers the reality beyond the appearances of the changing world.

As discussed above, the ancients widely recognized the experience of the Mysteries as transformative. By comparing philosophical insight to mystical experience, Plato accomplishes two goals. First, as he frequently does, Plato is using the analogy to something understood by his audience to introduce a philosophical idea that was unfamiliar to them. Recalling what the true "things that are" would be as alien to his audience as it is to us, describing how the Mysteries worked on people would not have been. Second, he is putting the idea of philosophical insight in the best light possible. We know from our ancient sources that the Mysteries were highly revered. Indeed, in Athens there were laws about giving the Mysteries the proper respect. One of the charges leveled against Alcibiades during the Peloponnesian War was *profaning* the Mysteries. Athens took

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241 Plato, *Plato: Euthyphro. Apology. Crito. Phaedo. Phaedrus*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Reprint of 1904 edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 483 (Phaedrus 249d).

242 Plato, 483 (Phaedrus 249e).

243 Plato, 484–85 (Phaedrus 250ac).

this charge so seriously that he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death *in absentia* for it! By comparing philosophical insight to mystical experience, Plato was quite boldly asserting the bona fides of the former. He would take this analogy even further in the *Symposium*.[244]

2. Symposium

In the *Symposium*, Plato has Socrates present a "discourse on Love [*Eros*]" that he says was given to him by a woman named Diotima of Mantinea. (201d)[245]. Socrates claims that before speaking with Diotima, he held a view much like Agathon's that Love is a god and lacks nothing in either beauty or virtue, and hence he has the power to create those things in others.[246] Diotima argues such a being could not desire the good and beautiful because it already possesses both; desire requires a lack. Instead, she convinces Socrates that Love is not a great god but "a great spirit [*daimon*].… [since] spirits are intermediate between god and mortal."[247] Indeed, she claims that the function of *daimones* is to be intermediaries between the immortal gods and mortal humans concerning things like divination, sacrifices, and magic.[248] If you seek wisdom, you must be one of "those who are in between" like Love.[249] She cleverly concludes that "Love must be a philosopher [i.e. a "lover of wisdom], and a philosopher is in a middle state between a wise man and an ignorant one."[250]

Socrates wonders what role Love plays in human life? Diotima then changes the question to what the lover of good things gains by possessing them. Socrates replies that that the object of the

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[244] Josh Wilburn has pointed out to me that "Plato might, like Heraclitus, also be appealing to the Mysteries because of the ineffability of the Forms: one has to have experienced them firsthand to understand them; one cannot describe them in any especially informative way." I think Josh must be correct here since both thinkers struggle with the inadequacy of language to communicate the experience of an ineffable truth.

[245] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 37 (Symposium 201e).

[246] Sheffield, 30 (196).

[247] Sheffield, 39 (202e).

[248] Sheffield, 39 (202e-203a).

[249] Sheffield, 40 (204b).

[250] Sheffield, 41 (204b).

lover is the possession of good things in order to be happy. She eventually convinces Socrates that "'Love is the desire to possess the good always."[251]

Diotima explains that we know something is love when "[i]t is giving birth in the beautiful, in respect of body and of soul."[252] Her clarification is even less straightforward as she claims that all of us are "pregnant" in body and soul and thus desire to give birth and pregnancy and procreation "is an aspect of immortality in the otherwise mortal creature, and it cannot take place in what is discordant."[253]

This desire to procreate manifests itself differently in different people, Diotima explains. If we are "pregnant in the body" we have sex and produce offspring with a member of the opposite sex.[254] In this way, we ensure a kind of immortality for ourselves through our children. If, however, we are "pregnant in the soul" we procreate by bringing wisdom into the world. If we are a poet, this expresses itself as personal excellence or virtue (*arete*). If we are politicians or lawgivers, wisdom expresses itself in the good laws and institutions we leave behind.[255]

It is at this climactic point that Diotima appeals to language that overtly evokes the Eleusinian Mysteries:

> These are aspects of the mystery of love [*erotika*] that perhaps you too, Socrates, might be initiated [*muetheis*] into. But for the final initiation and revelation [*teleia kai epoptika*], to which all this has been merely preliminary for someone on the right track, I am not sure if you have the capability. However I will do my utmost to explain to you, and you must try to follow if you can.[256]

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[251] Sheffield, 43 (206a).

[252] Sheffield, 43 (206b).

[253] Sheffield, 44 (206c-d).

[254] Sheffield, 46 (208e).

[255] Sheffield, 47–48 (209a, 209de). Numerous authors have pointed out the Eleusinian language in the *Symposium*. For example see Pierre Destrée, "The Speech of Alcibiades (212c4–222b7)," in *Platon: Symposion*, ed. Cristoph Horn, Klassiker Auslegen 39 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 191–205; Mark L. McPherran, "Medicine, Magic, and Religion in Plato's Symposium," in *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Frisbee C. C. Sheffield (Harvard University Press, 2006).

[256] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 48 (209e-210a).

Thus, she casts her entire account of Love (so far) as analogous to the Lower or Lesser Mysteries; rites of preparation and purification that preceded the Greater Mysteries that took place in the Telesterion.[257] The Greater Mysteries (*epoptika*) are outlined in the famous "ascent of desire" passage of the *Symposium* (210a-212b). In this passage Diotima "describes a series of attractions to a hierarchy of beautiful objects … culminating in the contemplation of an abstract and perfect Idea of Beauty."[258] Only then will the philosopher give birth to true virtue "because it is not an image that he is grasping but the truth."[259] The philosopher will thus earn the love of the gods and become immortal.[260]

As Nancy Evans has argued, Diotima (lit. "Zeus-honored"), acts as *mystagogos* for Socrates' initiation into philosophy in much the same way as Demeter herself acts in her own rites; she is "one who initiates individuals into her Mysteries and who mediates to humans information about the divine."[261] Just as in her Eleusinian rites the goddess brings mortal and immortal together through her mediation, so Diotima brings Socrates and his listeners closer to knowledge of the divine.

3. A Heraclitean Influence in Symposium?

A more implicit feature of *Symposium* is its Heraclitean concern with opposites. Indeed, the theme of opposites is evoked in Aristophanes' myth[262], and Heraclitus himself (a version of DK 51) is invoked in Erixymachus' speech

> Now, it is obvious to anyone who gives even the slightest thought to the matter that the same reconciliation of opposites applies in music. This perhaps is what Heraclitus meant, although his actual wording is not accurate; for he says of "the One" that "it is in agreement while being in disagreement with itself, like the harmony of the taut bow or the lyre".

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[257] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 66. At least from the fifth century B.C.E. onwards.

[258] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, xx.

[259] Sheffield, 50 (212a).

[260] Sheffield, 50.

[261] Evans, "Diotima and Demeter," 2.

[262] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 22–26 (189c-193b).

> However, to speak of a harmony as being in disagreement with itself, or as existing when it is composed of elements still in disagreement, is quite absurd.[263]

Puzzled by this, Erixymachus concludes that Heraclitus must mean that opposites are brought into agreement with one another, like high and low notes in a scale.

This is similar in sentiment to DK8, where Aristotle claims that: Heraclitus [scil. Says] **that what is opposed converges, and that the most beautiful harmony** (*harmonia*) **comes out of what diverges, and that all things come about by strife.** This fragment along with DK51 (**They do not comprehend how, diverging, it accords with itself: a backward-turning fitting-together** (*harmonia*)**, as of a bow and a lyre**) suggests another religious inspiration for Heraclitus, the cult of Apollo at Delphi. Apollo was, among other things, the god of music, truth, prophecy, and healing.

Erixymachus finally applies these musical ideas to the discussion of love, concluding that in harmony and rhythm music "creates agreement" between elements that are in disagreement "by implanting mutual love and unanimity between the different elements" just like medicine does.[264] Love is thus the force that helps create harmony and rhythm; it helps to bring together things that oppose one another.

Diotima's speech can be seen implicitly as her reaction to this Heraclitean puzzle as well. Her solution is Love himself. As the middle term between opposites, he mediates between them. Indeed, her own myth of Love's parentage is her chief pedagogical tool to explain this to Socrates. Love is born of two opposites: "Love is the child of the mortal woman Penia and the god Poros (personifications for want or lack, *penia*, and resource, *poros*, who is the divine son of the goddess Metis, or cunning)."[265] Love itself is the unification of opposites! It is the middle term that unifies

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[263] Sheffield, 19–20 (187a-187c).

[264] Sheffield, 20 (187c).

[265] Evans, "Diotima and Demeter," 11.

them. This, she argues, is the same position held by the philosopher, born by the opposites of ignorance and wisdom, he is their middle term; he is their mediator.

In other words, Diotima expands on Erixymachus' more simplistic analysis of Heraclitus to create something of greater philosophical importance. She (and Erixymachus) seems to hit very close to what Heraclitus himself seems to be saying in one of his criticisms of Homer:

> Heraclitus criticizes the poet [i.e. Homer] who wrote, "If only strife would vanish from gods and men! (Il. 17.107): **for there would not be any harmony** (*harmonia*) **if there were not high-pitched and low-pitched, nor would there be any animals without female and male, which are opposites.**[266]

Unifying opposites is creative. From opposites are born new things that each alone could not engender. As discussed above, the apparent meaning of the various kinds of "pregnancy" discussed by Diotima in the dialogue is concerned with the way in which mortals can achieve some sort of immortality. In other words, it is concerned with how the opposites mortal and immortal can be brought together in some way. The best solution to this problem, she says, is the philosopher. His "offspring" are the most immortal. If he can give birth to true virtue by contemplating the beautiful itself, "it is possible for him to be loved by the gods and to become, if any human can, immortal himself."[267]

4. The Mysteries and Bringing Together the Mortal and Immortal

In the Mysteries, the paramount pairing of opposites was mortal/immortal (i.e. humans/gods). One of the most characteristic traits of Greek religion was its extreme emphasis on the different ontological status of humans and gods. For example, humans could never experience pure good fortune, thus we have Achilles' consolation of Priam in *Iliad* 24.529-533 where Zeus either "gives a mixed lot [of gifts and ills or] … only of the baneful" but never pure good fortune.[268]

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[266] DK A22.

[267] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 50 (212a).

[268] Homer, *The Iliad: Books 13-24*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Loeb, 1999), 603.

We see it also in the Croesus Logos of Herodotus (I.32) in which Solon tells the Lydian king that "there are many to whom heaven has given a vision of blessedness, and yet afterward brought them to ruin."[269] Yet the most important difference between humans and gods is that the former die, while the latter do not. Indeed, a common word for humans in the Greek of both Homer and Plato is *thnetoi* which meant "those subject to death." The gods on the other hand, were frequently called *athanatoi* (lit. "deathless").

It naturally followed that gods not only never experienced death themselves, but rarely the loss of anyone they cared about. This is why Achilles' mother Thetis is a sympathetic figure. She was forced to marry a mortal and bear a son who would be subject to death. She was an immortal forced to experience a part of mortal life. Similarly, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the goddess is forced to experience the loss of her daughter to the deity that personifies death, Hades. The goddess' reunion with her daughter for two-thirds of the year is, in effect, a partial conquest of death, the blessings of which she shares with the initiates to her Mysteries. This partial conquest of death, this ascent to a portion of what immortality has to offer, is analogous to what Diotima in the *Symposium* claims for the philosopher who has "given birth to virtue." For the philosopher who has ascended it is "possible for him to be loved by the gods and to become, if any human [*anthropon*] can, immortal [*athanato*] himself."[270]

Indeed, the myth underlying the Mysteries has other important similarities to the story of Achilles in the *Iliad*:

> The wrath (*mênis*) and grief (*achos*) of both hero [Achilles] and goddess [Demeter] derive initially from the abduction of a woman (Briseis, Persephone) who becomes the wife or spear bride of the abductor (Agamemnon, Hades). The withdrawal of hero and goddess then results in immense losses for the Greeks or a destructive famine on earth, in Demeter's case

[269] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume I: Books I-II*, trans. A. D. Godley, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1920), 41.

[270] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 50 (212a).

> there are two withdrawals, one from heaven to Eleusis, the second to her temple at Eleusis.[271]

In Achilles' case, his return to battle resolves his wrath and grief, granting him immortal fame, but a shortened life. His fate is analogous to that of great poets and lawgivers, in Diotima's discussion of the "lesser mysteries" of Love.[272] Demeter's wrath and grief is resolved when her daughter is returned to her for most of the year, and the blessings of immortality are granted to all her initiates. They are much like the initiates into the "higher mysteries" of Love, who achieve something as close to the life of gods as is possible for mortals.

In both cases, it is the unification of opposites (i.e. immortal/mortal) which leads to the birth of something beautiful. As Foley puts it:

> By bringing divinity closer to mortal suffering and mortals closer to divine power, the story pattern of wrath, withdrawal, and return as it is enacted in both the *Iliad* and the *Hymn* mixes worlds that the entire Greek cosmos is designed to keep apart. When the world is reconstructed at the return, it can never be quite the same.[273]

I submit it is this that Heraclitus is referring to when he writes in DK62: **Immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the death of these, dying the life of those** (or Kahn: "Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others' death, dead in the others' life."). For immortals, experiencing something typical of *mortal* life—for example the loss of a loved one, is the only way they can truly experience death. For mortals, by contrast, dying and loss is a part of living. Yet their encounter with immortals brings them closer to the immortal state. For heroes like Achilles, this is immortal fame, for others the more tangible gift of a pleasant afterlife.

This latter scenario, a pleasant afterlife, is probably what the Mysteries offered initiates. Demeter and her daughter are paradigmatic cases of immortals that tasted the life of a mortal; they experienced separation by death. Because of that experience, we have Demeter's Mysteries which

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[271] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 92.

[272] Sheffield, *Plato: Symposium*, 47–48 (209).

[273] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 93.

bring mortals closer to the life of the immortals. The best way to understand DK62 is as an expression of this intriguing collision between categories of life which are traditionally thought of as separate in early Greek thought.

My view of DK62 is not the only one available. Kahn thinks this fragment is asserting the "heretical" idea that: "Mortals live the death of immortals" and "Immortals are dead in the life of mortals."[274] He also argues that Heraclitus uses "death" to signify a change of state, as one interpretation of its use in DK88 (**There is the same within, what is living and what is dead, what is awake and what is sleeping, and what is young and what is old;** for these, changing, are those, and those, changing in turn, are these) and perhaps DK36 (**For souls it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; but out of earth, water comes to be, and out of water, soul**) might suggest. As Kahn puts it "Human death — the death of each of us, and of those dear to us — will have to be understood as a phenomenon of precisely the same sort, a change of state within the total life cycle of nature."[275]

While plausible, Kahn's view strikes me as unnecessary. There was plenty of paradox in Greek religion. The inclusion of paradox is not necessarily an indication that Heraclitus is expressing something "heretical." We can easily find some of this weirdness in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* as well as the other *Homeric Hymns*. For example, consider the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* which recounts the tale of Tithonos. Tithonos was made immortal by Aphrodite, but not ageless, thus he withered away into nothing more than an immortal complaining voice. This mortal immortality was a kind of "living death." Still another example is the fate of Dionysos' mortal mother Semele. She hubristically wishes to see Zeus in his full glory and is burnt to ash as a result. Zeus' "life" was her death. Heracles, as a demigod half immortal and half mortal is himself a collision of the two categories. It

[274] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 128.

[275] Kahn, 129.

would take his death as a mortal for him to become an immortal. In all these cases we have the transformative collision of the immortal and the mortal. The ambiguities and parallelism in DK62 mirror the weirdness of the collision of mortal and immortal. Human life is like "death" to immortals, dying is the "immortality" of mortals. Accordingly, it is unnecessary for Kahn to reach for a figurative interpretation of the fragment that involves "cycles of nature."

To reiterate, DK62 (**Immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the death of these, dying the life of those)** is an intriguing example of the unity of opposites we might call a "unification of opposites." The fragment is an example of Heraclitus taking a familiar trope from Greek religion, the difference between mortals and immortals, to show both the dependence of the categories on one another[276] and that new categories (e.g. an immortal experiencing loss, immortality for mortals after death) are created by their collision.

C. The Eleusinian Influence on Philosophy: Heraclitus

In the previous sections we examined how the Eleusinian Mysteries were an influence on Plato's ideas about Love and the Forms in Symposium and how the Heraclitean themes and Eleusinian themes in that dialogue overlap. Next, we examined a key theme common to the Mysteries, to Symposium, and to Heraclitus: the relationship between mortals and the gods. For Plato, we draw close to the gods in perceiving the forms. This is like the way in the Mysteries we draw close to the gods by undergoing initiation. Finally, we saw how for Heraclitus, the relationship between mortals and immortals is an important instance of the unity of opposites. In this section, I want to further develop the connection between the Mysteries and Heraclitus ideas. First, I want to examine how the unity of opposites, inspired by the Mysteries applies to Heraclitus thinking about death. Second, I will show how the experience of the initiate explains what Kahn calls Heraclitus'

[276] That is to say that "immortals" (i.e. undying things) as category makes no sense unless there is a category of "mortals" (i.e. dying things).

"epistemic isolation." Third, I will argue that the communality of the experience of initiates into the Mysteries is a key inspiration for Heraclitus' insistence that the *logos* is something common, not private.

1. Mortality & Immortality in the Fragments

First, let us consider the connection between the unity of opposites and Heraclitus' ideas about death. Without this unification of opposites, Heraclitus declares that we experience something analogous to Diotima's "lesser mysteries. DK21- **Death is whatever we see when awakened; whatever we see when sleeping is slumber.** As mortal beings who are uninitiated, our everyday waking experience is that death is everywhere. Our friends, family, and enemies all die, and we can only hope to join them. When we sleep, we retreat into a world of just sleep. This is similar to the testimonium in DK89 which claims "Heraclitus says that those who are awake have a world that is one and in common, but that each of those who are asleep turns aside into his own particular world." One meaning of this fragment is that death is the common problem of all mortals.

Naturally, we wish to remedy this problem by ensuring some measure of immortality, even if this immortality, paradoxically, comes only after we die. One prospect is immortality through our children like those Diotima described as "pregnant in the body." This approach is not ideal and comprises one of the "lesser mysteries" in Diotima's account. Heraclitus seems to agree, but he has a more clearly negative evaluation. To be mortal is to die, to have an "allotted death." If we seek immortality through our children, we are only creating more beings to have "allotted deaths." Accordingly, we see in DK20 he writes **When they have been born they want to live to have their allotted deaths** (*moroi*), **and they leave children behind to be born as allotted deaths.**

As you will recall, this approach to immortality is not the only on offer in Diotima's account. One can seek through deeds to make one's name, at least, immortal. For example, another way is to take the path of Achilles, and seek immortal glory through military deeds. If one is a member of the

honored war dead (one whom Ares, god of war, has slain) one can expect inclusion in the memory of future generations.[277] Heraclitus recognizes this sort of immortality in DK24 - **Gods and humans honor those men whom Ares has slain.**

The greater the hero that dies, the greater his immortality through honor after death. Heraclitus submits DK25 – **Greater deaths** (*moroi*) **obtain greater portions** (*moirai*) – as a kind of companion to DK24. A more glorious death results in a longer "afterlife" for your reputation. *Moira*, is a word with a range of meanings that included: a) a share of material goods, b) allotted life span, and c) destiny/fate.[278] Thus in saying that the magnitude of your death determines the magnitude of your fortune, he is making clear that the manner of one's death correlates with the magnitude of one's "worth" after death.

The problem with these approaches to immortality is that we cannot be sure they will be successful. We may have children who bring shame on us or who consign our name to obscurity through neglect. Glory through death in battle is just as unruly a "child." We have no real control over our reputation after death. Our glory can easily be forgotten or twisted by the machinations of the living. We simply do not know what our "afterlife" will be and thus Heraclitus corrects us: DK27 - **What awaits humans after they have died is everything that they do not suspect nor suppose.** In effect, he is challenging his readers to put aside their assumptions about life and death, and to be more open to possibilities not considered by "private wisdom."

2. Initiation and Epistemic Isolation

We have seen that there are distinct similarities between Diotima's speech in the *Symposium* and some fragments of Heraclitus on immortality and life after death. This is not, however, the full

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[277] Nikias of Athens was effectively denied this by his omission from the lists of Athenian war dead. Although his infamy has granted him a measure of immortality through the histories of his failures.

[278] Lisa Ann Raphals, "Fate, Fortune, Chance, and Luck in Chinese and Greek: A Comparative Semantic History," *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4 (October 6, 2003): 554.

extent of the fragments which bear the imprint of Eleusis. At the core of Heraclitus' philosophy is a group of fragments that bears on the relationship between *logos* and the common (*to xynos*): DK1, DK2, DK17, and DK34. Usually these are taken, by Kahn[279] for example, as pronouncements about the difficulty and failure of humans to make sense of their own experience despite the resources given to them by their reasoning abilities. While there is truth in this interpretation, it leaves out the influence that Greek religious practices like the Mysteries had on Heraclitus in developing these ideas

For example, Kahn notes the "epistemic isolation" inherent in these fragments. Consider DK1: **And of this account** (*logos*) **that is-- always-- humans are uncomprehending, both before they hear it and once they have first heard it. For, although all things come about according to this account** (*logos*), **they resemble people without experience of them, when they have experience both of words and of things of the sort that I explain when I analyze each in conformity with its nature and indicate how it is. But other men are unaware of all they do when awake, just as they forget all they do while they are asleep.** Kahn notes how the last line reveals "the almost pathetic epistemic isolation of a man trying to convey the vision of an obvious and immediate truth to men who stagger past, unable to notice what they are doing all day long, as if it were a dream they cannot grasp or hold on to."[280] Kahn struggles with what this might mean about Heraclitus' relationship to Ionian science. He even compares this line to Bishop Berkeley's reaction to Newtonian optics.[281] Ultimately Kahn can only conclude that these fragments that reveal Heraclitus' "initial concern is less with the structure of reality than with the extreme difficulty of grasping this structure."[282]

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[279] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 96–104.

[280] Kahn, 99.

[281] Kahn, 100.

[282] Kahn, 100.

What Kahn misses is the connection between this "epistemic isolation" and struggle with "grasping [the] structure" of reality of these fragments, on the one hand, and the epistemic isolation and struggle that was a part of Greek mysticism, on the other. Recall the accounts of Plutarch, Aristotle, and others of how transformative the mysteries were for the initiated. An initiate was "set free and loose from all bondage, walks about, crowned with a wreath, celebrating the festival together with the other sacred and pure people, and he looks down on the uninitiated, unpurified crowd in this world in mud and fog beneath his feet."[283] This is the sort of state that Heraclitus thinks will lead people to the *logos*, but he is aware that this state cannot simply be communicated in words. Just as descriptions and analyses of the Mysteries do not make us into initiates, Heraclitus is worried that his readers will falsely conclude they understand him; that they will confuse the exoteric for the esoteric. In effect, DK 1 is Heraclitus warning his readers that reading his book will not be enough. Without experiencing the things he talks about, readers might as well be asleep.

We see a similar caution in DK 17: **Many people, as many as encounter things, do not think** (*phronein*) **that they are such** [scil. as they are] **and even after they have learned about them they do not understand them, but they think** [scil. that they do]**.** People frequently misunderstand things they think they have learned. Without the right state of mind – a mind that is receptive to ideas outside its own prejudices—people will not truly hear what experience (and Heraclitus) is trying to tell them. They are like those described in DK34: **Being uncomprehending, when they have heard they resemble deaf people-- the saying bears witness about them: 'being present, they are absent.'** Hearing about the *logos* or the Mysteries is simply not enough to make me comprehend either of them. Like a distracted student, I may know the words, but I have not thought about what they mean. In short, in DK1 and DK17 Heraclitus is trying to communicate

[283] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 70.

that knowledge is like the experience of the Mysteries, it cannot be communicated to others through words alone; it must be experienced.

Indeed, he says as much directly in another fragment: DK55 - **All the things of which sight** [*opsis*] **and hearing are knowledge** (*mathesis*) **I honor most**.[284] In other words, personal experience is the preferred road to knowledge. In another fragment DK19 – "Criticizing some people as unbelieving, Heraclitus says: **not knowing how to hear or speak"** or as Kahn translates it "Not knowing how to listen, neither can they speak." The initiated know how to listen, they hear with comprehension. The uninitiated are metaphorically incapable of either hearing or speaking. In other words, some people resemble the "deaf" alluded to in DK34. Since they have "uninitiated" minds, they cannot communicate what is communicated to them.

This is what separates Heraclitus from radical empiricism. The senses are important, but fallible. Something else is necessary to organize the senses: DK107 - **Bad witnesses for humans are the eyes and ears of those who possess barbarian souls.**[285] To the Greeks, a barbarian was someone who did not speak Greek. A person with functioning senses, but a soul that does not comprehend what they are sensing is comparable to a "barbarian" witnessing a discussion in Greek. This is because lacking a language in common with the Greeks he observes, he is missing a crucial factor in interpreting what he observes. The importance of sharing a common language or interpretive framework is no doubt one reason for the requirement that initiates into the Mysteries be Greek speakers. Without a knowledge of Greek an initiate could not be expected to understand

[284] It might seem strange that Heraclitus praises "hearing" here when the previous fragments criticize "hearing" in various ways. This strangeness is alleviated when we consider that those fragments were suspicious of the power of human communication to directly transmit knowledge or experience. In effect, they are critiques of reliance on uncritically repeating what is told to you in much the same way as in other fragments he dismisses the uncritical acceptance of things learned from books.

[285] A nod to the importance of the communal or social that pervades Heraclitus' thought. We shall discuss this topic further below.

what she heard. This emphasis on common language is another sign of the influence of the Eleusinian Mysteries on Heraclitus.

This points us further to DK2 -- **But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*), **most people live as though they had their own** [*idian*] **thought** (*phronêsis*). Without a common language/interpretive framework, you cannot have an experience in common. Without that you cannot have a rational understanding of experience. Of course, this was a practical limitation as well. As I wrote above, one could hardly comprehend what took place during the Mysteries without understanding the language used in the ritual. Heraclitus might also be intimating the same practical limitation is true of his own doctrines; one could hardly understand what is "common" if one had no idea what *xynos* meant.

Heraclitus' statements are shot through with Eleusinian inspiration. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* the anonymous poet "privileges seeing, and especially seeing with understanding and pleasure."[286] The motif is repeated many times during the poem and reaches its climax when Demeter demands that she *see* her daughter before she will end the famine.[287] Indeed, the goddess in the poem and the initiates to her rites progress from a stage of ignorance (*myesis*) to "the highest level of initiation in the Mysteries … *epopteia*, or seeing."[288] The darkness/light, blindness/seeing, ignorance/knowledge imagery abounds in all that we know about the Mysteries, from the procession to the darkened Telesterion with torches, to the gradual reveal of we-know-not-what when the hierophant emerged from the Anaktoron, bringing light into the darkened temple.

3. The Logos is Common: Social and Communal Themes Inspired by the Mysteries

Initiates were not in this darkened temple alone, of course; they were together as a group with other initiates who shared with them the common experience of this literal "enlightenment."

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[286] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 39.

[287] Foley, 38.

[288] Foley, 39.

This suggests another connection between the Mysteries and Heraclitus: the importance of the social or communal. Consider the following fragment: DK2 - **But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*), **most people live as though they had their own** [*idian*] **thought** (*phronêsis*). DK2 is a plain example of a theme we see throughout the fragments: the true nature of things is open to all, but many fail to understand it. Now it would be easy to see this theme, and this fragment, as just another kind of elitism, and to interpret Heraclitus as claiming for his followers a special status that most humans do not have. But this would only be half right.

While it is true that Heraclitus claims that most people do not understand the *logos*, he also claims that the *logos* is common (*xynos*). If the *logos* is common/shared it cannot be only the few that have access to it. The *logos* is not private property; it is public. The problem is that, despite this commonality, most people think their private (*idios*) thinking is the *logos*. Accordingly, the "elitism" of Heraclitus' philosophy is not of the chosen few who possess special (i.e. private) knowledge. Indeed, reliance on special knowledge alone seems to be a kind of hindrance, a turning away from what is common.

We can see this is this case is in the following two fragments where he takes some of his predecessors to task for their methodological failings:

> DK40: **Much learning does not teach intelligence: for otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and Xenophanes and Hecataeus.**
> DK57: **The teacher of the most people is Hesiod; they are certain** (*epistasthai*) **that is he who knows** (*eidenai*) **the most things-- he did not understand** (*gignoskein*) **day and night, for they are one.**
> **DK129: Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, devoted himself to investigation more than all other men, and after he made a selection of these writings [scil. probably: the writings of other people] he devised his own wisdom; much learning, evil artifice.**

In his paper on the subject Herbert Granger points out that polymathy (i.e. knowing many things) is probably being singled out because Heraclitus viewed it as a kind of "secondhand learning."[289] To know the things that Hesiod, etc. claim they know, they would have had to consult the accounts of others either orally or in writing. Heraclitus is suspicious of polymathy, argues Granger, because it "endows the polymath with a false sense of achieving a privileged epistemic position that only a handful of human beings would ever be able to attain."[290] But for Heraclitus, the *logos* is *common*, not private or privileged. Understanding is open to all, not just few who are fortunate enough to be well-read or well-traveled. Granger concludes that for Heraclitus "[t]here is no need for humans to scurry about, collecting odd pieces of information, however interesting that information may be in itself, since the fundamental truth about reality lies no farther away than in the homely truths of every man's daily life."[291]

Granger is correct that Heraclitus rejects the idea that only a few have the capacity to attain knowledge. He declares this directly in DK113: "**Thinking** (*phroneein*) **is in common for all**." And in DK116: **All humans have a share in knowing themselves and in thinking with moderation** (*sophronein*). Indeed, Heraclitus' view seems to be that the only true sort of knowledge is that which is, in principle, publicly accessible regardless of personal status. This sort of egalitarianism about knowledge strongly resonates with the culture of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Consider the stark contrast between the Mysteries and the Homeric/Hesiodic orthodoxy about the gods. That orthodoxy promised "immortal fame or Elysion to the aristocratic warrior, whereas the Mysteries gave their benefits to all mortals, regardless of sex and social status. These benefits were won not by good birth and individual achievement, but through initiation and submission to a mass collective

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[289] Herbert Granger, "Heraclitus' Quarrel with Polymathy and Historie," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 134, no. 2 (2004): 258, https://doi.org/10.1353/apa.2004.0010.

[290] Granger, 258.

[291] Granger, 258–59.

experience in which all share equally."[292] The experience was shared in common and its benefits were shared in common. I would therefore submit that the Mysteries were a paradigmatic case of a *logos* that was *xynos* (common).

First, we should recall how the Mysteries differed from other religious practices in the *poleis*. Foley explains this situation:

> In civic cults (as well as in many other rites of initiation), the participants' status as male or female, slave or free, citizen or resident alien played a central role, such cults (or rites) firmly embedded the participants in particular social roles. The rites at Eleusis, unlike many other rites of initiation, were tied to no stage of the life cycle (although initiates were with one exception adults) or aspect of civic life.[293]

The Telesterion was able to accommodate thousands so these diverse initiates experienced the Mysteries together as a mass. As Nancy Evans puts it: "In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the social unit brought together was general humanity, *anthropoi*, without the social or political distinctions upon which sacrifice within the polis was based."[294]

In addition, most Greek religious practices brought participants closer to the gods through the mediation of priests, priestesses, and rigid hierarchies of animal sacrifice. By contrast the Mysteries offered initiates the chance to experience "the divine through the power of the individual senses."[295] In short, the Mysteries were a firsthand, collective experience. Precisely the sort of epistemic situation that Heraclitus lionizes.

In fact, it is hard not to see a connection between the experience of the initiate and the association Heraclitus frequently makes between the "common" and the divine. For example, in DK114 compares the "common" with the divine:

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[292] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 144.

[293] Foley, 96–97.

[294] Evans, "Diotima and Demeter," 16.

[295] Evans, 5.

> **Those who speak with their mind** (*xun noôi*) **must rely** (i*skhurizesthai*) **on what is common** (*xunôi*) **for all, just as a city does on its law, and much more strongly** (*iskhurterôs*). **For all human laws are nourished** [*trephontai* lit. thicken, also foster or raise] **by one law, the divine one: for it dominates as much as it wants to, and it suffices for all, and there is some left over.**

Note that the comparison seems to focus on the elements of the divine law that are unqualified or absolute. The only limit of the domination of the divine law is its desire to dominate. The divine law is so plentiful it is more than enough for all. By this drumbeat of superlatives, Heraclitus is trying to reinforce the centrality of the communal in the minds of his readers.

Heraclitus is trying to impart through metaphor and puns the vital importance of bringing the experience of the Mysteries into everyday life. Remember that "[i]nitiates [of the Mysteries] become temporarily detached from their regular environment and enter into a 'liminal' experience in which the normal categories and hierarchies by which they define their world are sometimes terrifyingly blurred, transformed, or inverted."[296] This experience created, however briefly, two changes in the minds of the initiates: (1) solidarity with other initiates—what Plato or a Platonic author calls *hetaira*[297] (camaraderie, companionship) in his *Seventh Letter*, and (2) felt like "strangers" to themselves.[298] This one-two punch put initiates in the mental state that Heraclitus wanted his readers to foster: openness to commonality and critical distance from the self and its claim to its private wisdom.

This experience is the model for the following fragments about the self and the soul: DK45 – **He who travels on every road would not find out the limits of the soul in the course of walking: so deep is its account** (*logos*) and DK101 – **I searched for myself.** One can only search for oneself if one has become estranged from oneself in some way (DK101); when the familiar

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[296] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 95.

[297] Plato, *Plato: Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*, trans. R. G. Bury (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929), 507 (Epistles 7.333e).

[298] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 69.

becomes (temporarily) unfamiliar. To use a modern phrase, this "soul-searching" opens up new possibilities that could not have been imagined before this critical distance from the self has occurred. As a result, we see that the *logos* of the soul (*psyche*) is much deeper than we had imagined (DK45).

II. Heraclitus *Skoteinos* and Apollo *Loxias*: Heraclitean and Delphic Obscurity

In this section, I will consider the role the Delphic Oracle had on both the style and content of Heraclitus writing. In subsection A, I will discuss why Heraclitus chose to write in a way reminiscent of the oracular ambiguity we find in Apollo's oracles. In subsection B, I will examine how the "Delphic maxims" of that oracle were an influence on the ethical ideas of Heraclitus and other early ethical thinkers.

A. The Delphic Oracle and the Art of Ambiguous Advice

If Heraclitus is trying to point us to the common, experience, etc. then why does he write in a way that encourages different interpretations, plays with ambiguity, and generally frustrates readers? What is he really trying to say? The previous section provides with the beginnings of an answer. The Eleusinian Mysteries inspired Heraclitus. Like most mystery cults, the Eleusinian initiated swore not to tell what they saw and heard during the ceremonies. If Heraclitus was, as I have argued, trying to model a philosophical method on the experience of the Mysteries, he would not be able to simply say so directly.[299] Thus, a certain level of obscurity in his writing was necessary to conceal his inspirations from the uninitiated.

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[299] It is less obvious why we have no fragment of Heraclitus' work that indicates his *inspirations* directly. It may be that we simply have lost the fragments that mentioned this. It may be that Heraclitus thought the influence would be obvious, given the connection of his family to the Mysteries in much the same way we assume the work of Catholic priest was influenced by their Catholic background. It may be that he thought that the inspiration would be obvious to any literate Greek given the popularity of the cult. Certainly at least one ancient commentator got the hint. Recall the epigram I quoted in Chapter 3:

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 (*skotos*) is there and darkness devoid of light. But if an initiate (*mystes*) be your guide, the path shines brighter than sunlight Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bk. 9.26.

This problem was further complicated by his philosophical views. As we have seen from his critiques of Hesiod, Pythagoras, etc. Heraclitus was dubious that one could learn anything by reading alone. Reading can encourage repetition instead of understanding. Hence, we have his statement in DK50: **After you have listened not to me** (*emos*) **but to the account** (*logos*)**, it is wise to recognize** (*homologein*) **that all things are one.** How could he be sure that his readers would not simply regurgitate his words or worse, like the ritualistic followers of Pythagoras (DK129), create a patchwork doctrine from his ideas? His answer seems to be that the best way to avoid this kind of misappropriation is to make his writing too playful and difficult to pin down to appropriate. Luckily, there was a ready model available for Heraclitus: The Oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

Oracles and other types of divination pervaded the ancient world.[300] A sanctuary that provided divination, called a *manteion* or *chrēstērion*, was a place where one could ask the advice of the gods on an issue.[301] For example, Zeus' oracle at Olympia would give questioners information about future athletic victories and the oracle of Demeter near Patrai in the second century C.E. would reveal if a sick person would live or die.[302] But by far the most famous oracle in the ancient world was housed in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Its importance seems to have emerged in the seventh century B.C.E. The same period which saw the advent of the hoplite phalanx, the development of civic constitutions, the expansion of the Grecophone world through trade and colonization, new investment in sanctuaries, and the development of common myths about the gods.[303]

Heraclitus' failure to directly mention Eleusis may even be (and most probably is) another example of the tendency of ancient authors not to cite their sources. Widespread citation being a development of a much later era. After all, Heraclitus was not a Hellenistic, but an Archaic Greek who was writing during the birth of Classical Greek scholarship. There were no such norms yet.

[300] Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 284.

[301] Kearns, 284. Typically, the god in question was either Zeus or Apollo.

[302] Kearns, 285.

[303] Michael Scott, *Delphi: A History of the Center of the Ancient World* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 54.

Delphi's importance seems to have been linked to its role in supplying "charters" for almost all the new cities and sanctuaries that were founded outside of mainland Greece.[304] This common source of legitimacy acted as a stabilizing force for the new communities and forged greater connection between the Ionian diaspora and the mainland. As Michael Scott puts it in his history of Delphi:

> Surviving within this increasingly dynamic and unstable melting pot often required a response from developing communities to problems not encountered before. Within a world that was, at the same time, firmly of the belief that the gods were in charge of everything, the attraction of a system of oracular consultation, which allowed for divine confirmation of community decisions, and therefore the ability to ensure the development of a consensus of opinion for particular courses of action, is eminently understandable.[305]

Hence it is clear why the Greeks believed Delphi to be the literal "center of the world."[306]

There were several different forms of divination on offer at Delphi, but by far the most celebrated were the prophecies of the woman called the *Pythia*.[307] Accounts differ on how she prophesied but all seem to agree on the following. She entered the restricted area of the temple called the *adyton* and sat upon a tripod.[308] From this tripod she would answer the inquirer's question by uttering her *boai* (cries or songs).[309] Most of her surviving responses are in hexameter, but it is unclear whether she uttered her *boai* in this form, or if the male *prophētai* merely interpreted her response in that way.[310] She could only be consulted for one day per month (probably the seventh) and only during nine months of the year "since during the three winter months Apollo was considered absent from Delphi, and instead living with the Hyperboreans (a mythical people who

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[304] Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 285.

[305] Scott, *Delphi*, 56.

[306] Scott, 35–36. A stone known as the *omphalos* (lit. navel) marked the "precise" center at Delphi.

[307] Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 285.

[308] Kearns, 285.

[309] Scott, *Delphi*, 20.

[310] Kearns, *Ancient Greek Religion*, 285.

lived at the very edges of the world). During this time, Delphi may have been oracle-less but was not god-less; instead the god Dionysus was thought to rule the sanctuary."[311]

The Pythia, like other oracles, was famous for the obscurity or ambiguity of the answers she provided. Croesus of Lydia sought the advice of many oracles including the Pythia. As a matter of fact, the Pythia's most famous response was the same as that given by the oracle at the shrine of the hero Amphiareios to Croesus.[312] Both oracles told Croesus that "if Croesus were to wage war against the Persians, he would destroy a great empire."[313] Famously, Croesus concluded that the "empire" was that of the Persians and thus felt confident to invade Persia. The prophecy, however meant that his own Lydian empire would be destroyed. Another example of Pythian obscurity comes from the *Croesus Logos* in Herodotus. This time the Historian quotes the response as follows: "But whenever a mule becomes king of the Medes/Then, tender-footed Lydian, flee by the pebbled River Hermus/And do not delay, nor feel shame at being a coward."[314] Croesus again took this prophecy literally. He believed the prophecy meant that the literal offspring of a male donkey and a female horse would have to become king of the Medes. Since it was impossible for a mule to become king of the Medes, he was safe. However, the prophecy meant that a *figurative* "mule," the half-Persian/half-Mede Cyrus, would become king of the Medes. As a result, Croesus failed to heed yet another warning of the threat looming to the east of his kingdom.

It might seem strange that given this record, people would consult the Delphic oracle at all. If the Pythia's *boai* were so hard to interpret, they were arguably useless as predictions of the future. This would be a mistake, however. Most inquiries to the oracle were not like Croesus' straightforward request for a revelation of the future:

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311 Scott, *Delphi*, 13.

312 Amphiareios was one of the famous "seven against Thebes."

313 Herodotus, *The Landmark Herodotus*, bk. 1.53.

314 Herodotus, bk. 1.55.

> Very rarely, it seems, did consultants ask the oracle direct questions about the future (so Croesus's second question about whether he would win the war against King Cyrus of Persia was again an odd form of question). Instead, most questions put to the oracle seem to have been in the form of "would it be better and more profitable for me to do X or Y?" or else, "to which god shall I pray before I do X?" This is to say, consultants presented problems to the Pythia in the form of options, or rather sought guidance for how their goals might come about, rather than asking directly what would happen in the future.[315]

Scott is insightful on this issue. Ambiguity may, as Plutarch reasons, have protected the sanctuary from the anger of the powerful men that consulted it. [316] Ambiguous answers would have provided "cover" for the oracle and allow priests to place blame on literal-minded consultants like Croesus. More importantly, however, the ambiguous answers meant that the consultants needed to return to their cities and deliberate on the matter further. The ambiguous advice would thus become a new focus for a community previously deadlocked in debate. In other words, "[c]onsulting the Pythia thus did not always provide a quick answer to a straightforward question, but rather paved the path for a process of deliberation that allowed the community to come to its own decision."[317]

Scott argues that function of the oracle was less like a fortune-telling service and more like "a 'sense-making mechanism' for the individuals, cities, and communities of ancient Greece."[318] He correctly connects this to Heraclitus' statement in DK93 that **The lord whose oracle** [*manteion*] **is the one in Delphi neither speaks nor hides, but gives signs** [*semainei*]**.** The Greek for "gives signs," is derived from the root word *sēma* which means "sign" or "signal."[319] Someone "makes a *sēma*" when "he or she speaks from a superior vantage point, as when a scout goes to the top of a hill and then comes back down to indicate what he or she saw."[320] The word is ultimately derived

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[315] Scott, *Delphi*, 27.

[316] Scott, 29. Heraclitus' own ambiguity may have served a similar function for him. Obscuring the Eleusinian inspiration of his philosophical ideas and protecting him from a charge of blasphemy.

[317] Scott, 29.

[318] Scott, 30.

[319] Gregory Nagy, "Ancient Greek Poetry, Prophecy, and Concepts of Theory," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition*, ed. James L. Kugel (Cornell University Press, 1990), 62.

[320] Nagy, 63.

from the Sanskrit *dhyāna* which means a kind of "inner vision."[321] Metaphorically, this refers to someone speaking authoritatively or with special insight into the matter under discussion.[322] Apollo, as a god, has a supreme vantage point and thus has special insight to offer those that seek his aid. The presumption of the exchange between questioner and god is that Apollo is granting inner vision or insight. He is not simply "telling" an answer but letting the questioner see, at least in some partial way, from the god's eye view. In other words, Apollo does not "speak" but he is not hiding the truth either. Instead, he "indicates" so that the questioner can work out the truth behind the appearance themselves through their own experience, so to speak.

I submit that Heraclitus is modeling his own communication style on that of the Oracle. By joining this with his other statements about polymathy and experience we can see that he is relying on something (very roughly) like the following line of reasoning. We know that the *logos* is common to all (like the experience of the Mysteries), yet some people act as though wisdom were their private property. For example, some people ape the written or spoken ideas of others (polymaths) instead of experiencing this common *logos*. Others experience things yet misinterpret them because of their "barbarian souls." Thus, wisdom cannot be imparted by language alone or experience alone but must come from common experience structured by a common language. The Delphic Oracle seems to use language and yet its prophecies are not amenable to being plagiarized because they all need to be interpreted to be understood. Proper interpretation requires more than just a common language; it requires common experience.

For Heraclitus, the paradigm common experience was initiation into the Mysteries. In that setting, the shared (another meaning of the term *xynos*) experience of the ritual itself went beyond the various "private" experiences of the participants and brought them close to the divine.

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[321] This same word signifies meditation practices in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. The "Zen" in Zen Buddhism is this same word rendered in Japanese.

[322] Nagy, "Ancient Greek Poetry, Prophecy, and Concepts of Theory," 63.

Presumably, if you were familiar with the Mysteries as an initiate, they were more comprehensible to you in that unique way. The same, theoretically applies to Heraclitus' own writings, which try to simulate the liminal experience of the Mysteries using another religious technique: oracular ambiguity. For ancient Greeks, oracular ambiguity was another way to bring communities together for a common/shared experience—the experience of resolving the ambiguity. The anecdotes about misunderstanding an oracle, or resolving the ambiguity incorrectly, can be seen as cautionary tales about applying one's limited private perspective to divine pronouncements. As Julia Kindt writes:

> Ambiguous oracles provide an opportunity for mortals to rethink the premises on which their own interpretations and the knowledge derived from them are based. People who consider the complexity of phenomena in the world mirrored in the complexity of the oracular language are successful. Those, in contrast, who think too narrowly and see only what they want to see will fail.[323]

Arguably, this is what was lacking in Croesus that led to his failure to resolve the Oracle's ambiguities correctly. He was applying his "private wisdom" to the oracles he received and not embracing the full complexity of the phenomena they could be describing.

In summary, oracular ambiguity forces a person to abandon their pretensions to private wisdom in favor or a shared/common view that is closer to the divine perspective; this is an extremely Heraclitean lesson. It is thus unsurprising that Heraclitus adopted the Oracle's communication style as the best way to communicate the *logos* to his readers. To highlight this fact, Heraclitus seems to be "giving us a sign" of this in the structure of DK 93 (**The lord whose oracle** [*manteion*] **is the one in Delphi neither speaks nor hides, but gives signs** [*semainei*]**.)** itself. **S**ome scholars have noted that the fragment, in Delphic fashion, does not identify Apollo by name, but by his title and location.[324] Delphic Apollo was called *Loxias* ("ambiguous," from *loxos*, lit. "slanting") for good reason; perhaps the same reason that Heraclitus was called *skoteinos* ("obscure").

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[323] Julia Kindt, "Oracular Ambiguity as a Mediation Triple," *Classicum* XXXIV, no. 1 (April 2008): 26.

[324] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 123.

DK93 is usually paired with DK92: **The Sibyl with her raving mouth** […]. We don't have the full quotation, so it is difficult to ascertain what Heraclitus was aiming at here. Kahn and is convinced that there must have been some critique of the prophetess that followed, which Plutarch neglected to include.[325] I am inclined to agree with Robinson, however, who writes that Heraclitus is saying something to the effect that "just as the Sibyl, for all her mirthless 'ravings,' conveys the voice of Apollo, so he, Heraclitus, however strange he may sound, conveys the logos of 'that which is wise'"[326] The Sibyl's "raving mouth" gives signs in much the same way that the Pythia's rhyming mouth does: indirectly. Neither experience nor language are self-interpreting and the answers of the Pythia and the Sibyl exemplify this fact.

Plutarch argued that Apollo's ambiguity was a spur to philosophical thinking. For just as an oracle from the god to double the size of the altar required his worshipper to learn geometry, so too does the god's ambiguity teach them "logical reason." "[w]hen the god gives out ambiguous [*amphibolous*] oracles, he is promoting and organizing logical reasoning [*dialektikēn*] as indispensable for those who are to apprehend his meaning aright."[327] The "trick" was seeing beyond the obvious or apparent meaning of the oracle. As Heraclitus tells us in DK54: **Invisible fitting-together** (*harmonie*)**, stronger than a visible one.** We must not rely on our "private thought" and risk being fooled like Croesus, or like Homer in DK56:

> **Regarding the knowledge of things that are evident, humans are fooled in the same way as Homer. Who was wiser than all the other Greeks. For boys who were killing lice fooled him by saying, 'The ones we see and grasp, we leave behind; the ones we do not see or grasp, we take away.'**

This fragment seems to be based on an anecdote about the life of Homer that went something like this:

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[325] Kahn, 126.

[326] Robinson, *Heraclitus*, 145.

[327] Plutarch, *Plutarch: Moralia, Volume V*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), 211, (The E at Delphi, 386e-f).

> … Homer, after having spent some time on Samos, went to the island of Ios. There he was approached on the beach by some boys fishing, whom he asked whether they had caught anything. Instead of admitting that they were going home empty-handed, they answered by presenting the riddle. Unable to make sense of their words, Homer is reported to have passed away. [328]

Since the boys were fishing, Homer assumed that "the ones" they were referring to were fish. Accordingly, it made no sense to him that they would "leave behind" fish that they caught but "take away" fish that they had not. Thus, DK56 in many respects resembles DK 17: **Many people, as many as encounter things, do not think** (*phronein*) **that they are such** [scil. as they are] **and even after they have learned about them they do not understand them, but they think** [scil. that they do] [*eōutoisi de dokeousi*]**.** Many people, including Homer, believe the "private knowledge" or preconceptions that they bring to experience. Homer was asking about fish, so he assumed that the boys would answer about fish. Instead, the boys were jokingly referring to lice. Since those that they could find and grasp they threw away and those they could not remained on them. Homer resolved the ambiguity incorrectly. Similarly, Heraclitus reminds us (DK18) that **If one does not expect the unexpected one will not find it** (*exeurein*)**, for it cannot be searched out** (*anexereuneton*) **nor arrived at** (*aporon*)**.** If we expect the *expected*, that is all that we will find. We will find nothing but our "private knowledge" in everything that we encounter in experience.

As I alluded to above, there was one area of the shared experience of ancient Greeks that Heraclitus could expect his readers to know that they must puzzle through to understand: oracles and riddles. This is also what I think Plutarch means when he says the Oracle's ambiguity "promotes and organizes" logical reasoning [*dialektikēn*]. The stories about Croesus and others that failed to "expect the unexpected" put us all on notice (i.e. "organizes" our thinking) that we cannot simply take our preconceptions for granted. Consequently, deciphering oracles gives us practice in applying

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[328] Roman Dilcher, "How Not to Conceive Heraclitean Harmony," in *Doctrine and Doxography: Studies on Heraclitus and Pythagoras*, ed. David Sider and Dirk Obbink (Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 266.

this kind of thinking in other areas of life (i.e. promoting logical reasoning). I submit that Heraclitus is similarly interested at "promoting and organizing" dialectic in his readers. Accordingly, he chooses a "Delphic" style to reproduce the potential of ambiguous oracles for doing so.

B. The Delphic Maxims and Early Ethics

Yet Heraclitus takes more than his style from Apollo's Oracle. Much like Socrates after him, he reworks some of the Oracle's ethical precepts as well. It is well-known that the Temple of Apollo at Delphi had maxims inscribed that were viewable to those that entered the sanctuary: "Know thyself" (*gnothi sauton*), "Nothing in excess" (*meden agan*), and "An oath leads to perdition" (*eggua para d'ate*).[329] The first of these seems to have been an influence on Socrates' parting thought that "the unexamined life is not worth living."[330] This along with the second maxim seems to have been a major theme in pre-Platonic ethical thinking in plays, poems, histories, and other works. This "morality of measure and moderation" is what Kahn calls the "Delphic view" of morality.[331] The Delphic view contrasts with the "heroic ideal" which praises "unlimited self-assertion" and the "drive for pre-eminence."[332] Kahn summarizes the differences by saying that "the heroic world of the epic

> … is dominated by the competitive, self-assertive conception of *arete* expressed in the formula 'always be best' (*aei aristeuein*), and reflected in Croesus' ambition to be the happiest of men. The Delphic view, on the other hand, which Herodotus expresses in his judgment on Croesus, invokes divine jealousy to discourage the kind of self-aggrandizement that poses a threat to the civic community. In military terms, the model for the heroic ideal is personal combat between champions. The model for the ideal of moderation and restraint, on the other hand, is the serried rank of hoplite soldiers, whose security and success depend on their advancing and withdrawing in unison, since each hoplite covers his neighbor's flank with the left half of his shield.[333]

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[329] Scott, *Delphi*, 138.

[330] Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates (Third Edition): Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Death Scene from Phaedo*, trans. G. M. A. Grube and John M. Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1923), 29, (Apology 38d).

[331] Charles H. Kahn, "Pre-Platonic Ethics," in *Ethics*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge England ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31.

[332] Kahn, 31.

[333] Kahn, 31.

The Delphic view's bywords were justice and temperance (*sōphrosunē*), whereas the heroic ideal spoke only of excellence (*arete*) and focused on courageous self-assertion.

Heraclitus' ethical and political views were clearly influenced by this tug-of-war between Apollo and Homer. This is clearest in DK112: **"To be moderate** [*sōphronein*, "sound thinking"]**: the greatest virtue** [*arete*]**. Wisdom: to speak the truth and to act in conformity with the nature** [scil. of each thing]." Here, Kahn explains, Heraclitus seems to be reworking the "quiet virtue of temperance or self-control (*sōphrosunē*)" into a kind of intellectual virtue, "sound thinking" (*sōphronein*).[334]

Yet Kahn is unsure what to make of Heraclitus' ethical views. He sees a tension between DK112 and statements like DK24 - **Gods and humans honor those men whom Ares has slain** and DK119 – **Character** [*ethos*]**, for a human, is his personal deity** [*daimon*]**.** Kahn sees these fragments as evidence that Heraclitus held to the heroic ideal. However, I think Kahn is mistaken here. There is no contradiction between the Delphic view, as Kahn himself lays it out, and honoring war dead. Kahn himself says that the military model was the hoplite phalanx, and we know that fallen hoplites were collectively, and sometime individually, honored by their *poleis*. Nowhere does Heraclitus say that gods and men only honor those that have fallen in *personal* combat.

Further, Kahn seems to think that since DK119 implies "that a man's fortune depends upon his character rather than on the gods"[335] that Heraclitus is rejecting traditional religious conceptions. But Kahn concludes too much here. If there was one "traditional conception" of fortune or fate in ancient Greece, it was that a man's character *and* the gods were determinative. Consider the curse of the House of Atreus. Tantalus, a Lydian king invited the gods to dinner. Thinking himself cleverer than the gods, he attempts to trick them into eating the flesh of his son, Pelops. The gods recognize

[334] Kahn, 32–33.

[335] Kahn, 32.

the ruse and punished Tantalus in Tartarus with hunger and thirst forever. The gods restore Pelops to life, but like his father he would also make poor choices. Desirous of marrying the princess Hippodamia, he plots with his servant Myrtilus to rig her father's chariot to fail so that he might win her hand in marriage. Having won his bride, he refused to reward Myrtilus as promised. When Myrtilus tried to take Hippodamia as compensation, Pelops killed him. In his dying moments, Myrtilus inflicted a curse on Pelops and all his descendants. Pelops' sons Thyestes and Atreus competed for the throne of Mycenae. Its king, Eurystheus, promised to make king the man that could produce the golden fleece of a lamb. Atreus had squirreled a golden fleece away years ago. He had promised this fleece to Artemis but had kept it for himself. Unbeknownst to him, his wife was the lover of his brother Thyestes. She gave the fleece to him and Thyestes was made king of Mycenae. Certain that Zeus wanted him to be king as the older son, Atreus declared the sun would rise in the west and set in the east the next day. When it did, he usurped his brother's kingship. He banished his brother, and soon discovered his wife's infidelity. To get revenge, he invited Thyestes to dinner and fed Thyestes' own sons to him. When Atreus reveals this to his brother, Thyestes cursed the House of Atreus. Aegisthus, Atreus' adopted son and the biological son of Thyestes and Atreus' niece/wife, would eventually murder Atreus. This curse would not end until after the Trojan War with Atreus' sons Agamemnon and Menelaus.

We can easily see that every step of the way, that each member of this cursed house enacts the curse by their own immoral actions. They break promises, cheat the gods, violate *xenia* (guest-rite), butcher their own kin, etc. The sufferings of the cursed are *both* a cursed fate brought about by the gods, as well as the consequences of their own choices. Thus, there is a real sense in which the poor characters of the Pelopids resulted in the ruin they experienced. They were inclined to transgress, and thus their divine punishment was transgression against them. Recall again the three Delphic maxims: "Know thyself" (*gnothi sauton*), "Nothing in excess" (*meden agan*), and "An oath

leads to perdition" (*eggua para d'ate*). Taken together, they all recommend living within one's own limits, and keeping one's word. About every Pelopid discussed above violates one or more of these maxims.[336]

Each time, hubris, the sin of transgressing boundaries, was the cause of the meted punishment. One is put in mind of another Heraclitean fragment, DK43: **One must extinguish arrogant violence** (*hubris*) **more than a conflagration.** Here Heraclitus reveals the deep connection between his philosophy and the political problems of his time. In other words, in a rare moment of unambiguousness, he is condemning a common source of *stasis* (civil war), i.e. *hubris*. As we saw in Chapter 1, the Hellenic world before, during, and after Heraclitus' life was driven by civil and international wars, sudden changes of government, and reversals of fortune for both individuals and nations. As we have seen, Heraclitus turned lessons he learned from Greek religion into an early philosophical method. This method emphasized experience over rote learning, rational analysis over imitation, and the common over the private. Given these factors and his historical milieu, it is unsurprising that he repeatedly emphasizes conflict in his thinking. What is surprising, however, is *how* he understands conflict; what lessons he thinks it can teach us. Thus conflict, and the relationship of conflict to law and justice will be the topic of the next chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the influence that Greek religion had on Heraclitus' philosophy. I showed how the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Oracle of Delphic Apollo helped form the content of Heraclitus' views and the manner in which he expressed them. From the Mysteries,

[336] Tantalus thinks himself cleverer than the gods, so for his hubris (violating the first and second maxims) he is punished in the afterlife. Pelops breaks his promise (violating the third maxim) so a curse falls upon his descendants. Atreus keeps the fleece he promised Artemis to himself (violating all three maxims) so he is made a cuckold and denied the kingship. When, as the eldest son, the gods eventually allowed him the throne of Mycenae, he fails again. He feeds his nephews' flesh to Thyestes, taking on another curse and further angering the gods. This leads to his murder by Aegisthus, and the flight of his natural born sons to Sparta.

we get his complicated views of the relationship between mortals and immortals, his theme of epistemic isolation despite the commonality of the *logos*, and the importance of shared experience to remedy our epistemic failings. In short, that people fail to know the *logos* because they try to find it alone through books or their own investigation. What they end up with is their own "private" understanding and not an understanding of the *logos*. To remedy this, they should become like those initiated into the Mysteries, participants in a shared/common experience. The *logos* is common, so we must seek it through common experience.

We saw that Heraclitus was aware that authoring a conventional book would not be the best way to communicate these ideas. Readers would not get a truly common experience from a book, and they would be tempted to selectively interpret it like the polymaths he criticizes. Thus, he looked to the Oracle of Apollo for a model. The Oracle communicated knowledge using words unconventionally. Just as the intention of the Oracle's ambiguous poetry is to provide direct insight to the hearer, Heraclitus' ambiguous aphoristic style is meant to do the same. Working through a cryptic saying is thus an analog of the shared experience of initiates witnessing the Mysteries. Heraclitus' writing is intended to not to simply *speak* a truth but *lead* you to that truth by inducing you to have an experience. In this case, the experience of working through his gnomic writing.

We also saw Delphi influenced Heraclitus' ethics through the Delphic Maxims: "Know thyself" (*gnothi sauton*), "Nothing in excess" (*meden agan*), and "An oath leads to perdition" (*engua para d'ate*). In particular we saw how his views on *hubris* were influenced by the maxims' suggesting that we live within our own limits and not transgress boundaries. These ideas would help to form part of the core of his ethical/political views, the subject matter of Chapter 4 of this essay.

CHAPTER 4: CONFLICT, LAW, & JUSTICE IN THE POLITICAL FRAGMENTS

Chapter 3, on the role that religion had in shaping Heraclitus' ideas, ended with the beginning of a discussion on the role that *hubris* plays in Heraclitus' ethical/political ideas.[337] We saw that this idea of *hubris* was connected to the early ethical thinking inspired by the Delphic maxims: "Know thyself" (*gnothi sauton*), "Nothing in excess" (*meden agan*), and "An oath leads to perdition" (*eggua para d'ate*). We also saw that *hubris* was not simply a religious and ethical failing, but a political problem. *Hubris* was the term given to the transgressive violence that led to *stasis* (civil war) in Greek cities and thus *hubris* was connected to early political thinking as well as religious thinking.

This term's range of meaning clearly affected Heraclitus, but his unique take on conflict modulates his own views of *hubris*. In Heraclitus' day conflict was pervasive. As one modern historian puts it "[w]herever there were borders in ancient Greece there was war."[338] War could occur between or within *poleis*. Sometimes the lines between those categories could blur, as the Persian Wars amply show. Some *poleis* were divided between their pro-Persian and anti-Persian citizens, effectively making an international war a civil war.

Early political and legal thinking attempted to generate remedies to the problems associated with a world in conflict. The intent of laws punishing *hubris,* for example, was preventing the initial stages of *stasis* (civil war). We see concern over conflict as early in Greek thinking as the poets. Homer, for example, wishes that "strife [*eris*] perish from among gods and men."[339] Hesiod, as we shall see below, distinguished between two distinct types of conflict, one bad and another good. In early philosophy, as we saw in Chapter 1, Anaximander suggested the cosmos itself individuated into

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[337] I will be using "ethical" and "political" quite interchangeably as in Heraclitus and most ancient Greek thinkers the topics were not easily separated.

[338] Alan M. Greaves, *The Land of Ionia: Society and Economy in the Archaic Period*, 1 edition (Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 145.

[339] Homer, *The Iliad: Books 13-24*, 2:295, (18.107).

things by a type of conflict he called "injustice" (*adikia*). Indeed, we have little more of Anaximander's writing than the following fragment where he claims that

> … the principle (*arkhê*) and element of beings is the **unlimited** (*to apeiron*) … And the things out of which birth comes about for beings, into these too their destruction happens, **according to obligation: for they pay the penalty** (*dikê*) **and retribution** (*tisis*) **to each other for their injustice** (*adikia*) according to the order of time.[340]

We also saw that this metaphysical idea was related to Anaximander's political project for the constitutional reform of Miletus. Thinkers of this period did not neatly separate cosmological ideas and political ideas.

Heraclitus had his own thoughts on politics. He had his own take on the interplay between conflict, law, and justice in preserving the *polis*. His views hinge on his understanding of conflict as the interdependence between opposed things. This understanding is coterminous with his doctrine of the "unity of opposites." Recall that this doctrine does not hold, as some think, that contradictory qualities are identical, but asserts something like the "interconnectedness of contrary states in life and in the world."[341] Heraclitus' idea of conflict is the application of this idea to politics.

He is not interested in the eradication of conflict, but the careful management of conflict that is beneficial to the *polis*. Law (*nomos*) and justice (*dike*) are the tools by which a functioning *polis* accomplishes this. Law (*nomos*) creates cohesion among a disparate citizenry. It creates something akin to "national identity." This curtails civil conflict, but necessarily assumes the possibility of international conflict such as the defense of the *polis* from foreign domination. Justice (*dike*) presumes internal conflict for which it is a remedy. Heraclitus' model of the *polis* restricts conflict to adversarial legal competition, rather than street violence or competition for control over the *polis* itself; lawsuits rather than gang war.

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[340] Laks and Most, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume II*, 285. (B1).

[341] Graham, "Heraclitus."

Inasmuch as understanding "conflict" is crucial to understanding Heraclitean political thinking, in part I I will briefly examine how I will be using the word "conflict" to refer to an idea that Heraclitus uses several words to indicate. In short, Heraclitus sees an interdependence between opposed things that previous thinkers either ignored or downplayed. In Part II I will discuss Heraclitus' position on the role that law (*nomos*) and justice (*dike*) have in his political thought and how they in turn relate to conflict. Heraclitus believed that we cannot do away with conflict could because it is an essential part of how *poleis* function. Instead, he recommended harnessing conflict to maintain the cohesion of the *polis*. This approach will allow me to interpret fragments with hitherto overlooked political implications. Finally, in Part III I will briefly examine the question of whether Heraclitus adhered to any identifiable political ideology. In my view, there is no compelling evidence that he was the anti-democrat that some interpreters have made him out to be, but neither is there persuasive evidence that he was pro-democratic.

I. Conflict: *Polemos* and *Eris*

To understand Heraclitus, we must employ a technical definition of "conflict" to grasp the subtlety with which Heraclitus explicitly (i.e. *polemos*, *eris, diapheromenon,* etc.) and implicitly discusses the concept. Heraclitus refers to "conflict" by using the words *polemos* (war, battle) in DK53 (**War** [*polemos*] **is the father of all and the king of all, and has revealed that the ones are gods and the others humans, and has made the ones slaves and the others free**) and *eris* (strife, discord, dispute) in DK80 (**One must know that war** [*polemos*] **is common** [*xynos*]**, that justice** [*dike*] **is strife** [*eris*]**, and that all things come about by strife and constraint**).

As one can see, in DK53 and DK80, Heraclitus seems to be using *polemos* and *eris* in a comparable way. In DK53, he identifies *polemos* as the phenomenon or concept that differentiates categories from one another. War is the reason that some are gods, and some are humans, and the reason some are slaves and others free. In other words, war has an organizing function on both the

cosmic and societal level. This organizational function is like the one Heraclitus gives the *logos*. Recall that in DK1 he says that **all things come about according to this account** (*logos*). If one's metaphysical and social status come about because of war (*polemos*), then war must somehow be connected to the *logos*.

This implicit connection between *polemos* and *logos* carries over into DK80. In that fragment, Heraclitus declares that war (*polemos*) is "common" (*xynos*) in a clear echo of DK2 (**But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*)**, most people live as though they had their own thought** (*phronêsis*)). The second clause of DK80 similarly links justice (*dikê*) and strife (*eris*) in a rebuke of Anaximander.[342] Finally, the last clause of DK80 clarifies that he is using *eris* (strife) as a general concept that includes *polemos*.

Since it would be confusing to jump between *polemos* (war) and *eris* (strife) throughout this essay, I have chosen the English word "conflict" as an approximation of both. My use of "conflict" in this paper is meant to pick out the concept that I believe that *polemos* and *eris* are meant to indicate in the fragments. The English word "conflict" can mean physical fighting, prolonged struggle, internal struggle, or the clashing of opposed things like sentence, principles, or arguments.[343] "Conflict," comes from Latin "*conflīctus,*" the participial stem of *confligere* (*con-* together +*flīgĕre* to strike) which means "striking together." [344] So, the word, like Heraclitus' use of *polemos*, *eris*, etc. carries the suggestion of opposed things being together.

Indeed, *eris* is so similar in usage to the English word "conflict" that some translate *eris* as "conflict." We can see this most clearly in Hesiod's use of the word. In the *Works and Days* Hesiod refers to the two *Erides*. One *Eris* that is the cause of "evil war" [*pólemón te kakòn*] and the other *Eris*

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342 We will discuss this connection between these ideas further in Section II below.

343 "Conflict, n.," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

344 "Conflict, n."

is the striving to be better than one's peers.[345] Heraclitus' fellow Presocratic Empedocles believed that *eris* was the fundamental force in the cosmos that caused the four elements to divide from one another, while love was the force that brought them together.[346] It can also carry the connotation of "struggle" as in the following line from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: "Yes, Zeus of Assemblies has triumphed; and my struggle [*eris*] in the cause of good has won a victory that will last for ever."[347] So the term is used to indicate division, opposition, dispute, or even competition.

As I understand him, one of Heraclitus' core insights foregrounds the interdependence between opposed things. As Heraclitus puts the matter in DK51: **They do not comprehend how, diverging** [*diapheromenon*]**, it accords with itself: a backward-turning fitting-together** (*harmonia*), **as of a bow and a lyre.**[348] Note that to illustrate his point he chooses artifacts associated with the god Apollo (i.e. the bow and lyre).[349] Both artifacts have parts that are in metaphorical strife (*eris*) with one another. Yet it is this "conflict" between the string of the bow and the strings of the lyre and the body of each object which allow them to function, or to fit-together (*harmonia*). Harmony is thus dependent on the conflict within each instrument. The opposed are interdependent. Accordingly, I will use "conflict" to mean both the opposition between things, but also to indicate the interdependence of those opposed things.

Heraclitus states this doctrine most explicitly in what I call the "war fragments": DK53: **War is the father of all and the king of all, and has revealed that the ones are gods and the others**

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345 Hesiod, *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, trans. Glenn W. Most, vol. 1, Hesiod (Harvard University Press, 2006), ll. 11–26. Indeed, some have argued that Hesiod is using the *erides* as a way of talking about "the ambiguity of the world." Michael Gagarin, "The Ambiguity of Eris in the Works and Days," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastronarde (Atlanta, 1990), 173–83.

346 Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists*, 144.

347 Aeschylus, *Aeschylus: Oresteia. Agamemnon ; Libation- Bearers ; Eumenides*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Aeschylus (Harvard University Press, 2008), ll. 973–975.

348 Alternatively, we have K78: "They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre."

349 For more on Heraclitus' connection to Apollo see Chapter 2 of this essay.

humans, and has made the ones slaves and the others free and DK80: **One must know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things come about by strife and constraint.** But several other fragments also contain clear elements of conflict as well. To understand this, we need to get a better grip on the developing concepts of law (*nomos*) and justice (*dikê*) in the relevant period. This shall be the subject of section II.

II. Law (*Nomos*), Justice (*Dike*), and *Hubris*[350]

Nomos is the word for "custom," which "according to context may swing towards our concept of law or towards that of culture."[351] Through most of the archaic period *nomos* was not the word for written law; instead other words were employed: "*thesmos* ('what is laid down'), *rhêtra* ('what is said'), and *graphos*, *grammata* ('what is written')."[352] Instead, *nomos* could refer to a "way of life" (i.e. in describing the behavior of birds as their *nomos*), conventional opinion or practice (i.e. Democritus saying "By *nomos* sweet, by *nomos* bitter, by *nomos* hot, by *nomos* cold; but in truth atoms and void"), or it could be used as part of compound words like *eunomia* (good order), *anomia* (lawlessness), and *autonomia* (self-law i.e. not ruled by a tyrant).[353]

Scholars attribute a titanic shift in applied political thinking to the Athenian lawgiver Solon, but he maintains this traditional understanding of *nomos*, instead preferring to use *thesmos* as the word for written law.[354] Solon's Athens (594 B.C.E.) was wracked by debt-slavery, aristocratic in-fighting, and the threat of *stasis* (civil war). Into this mess Solon provided a new "constitution" for Athens. His laws, often called the "shaking-off of burdens" (*seisachtheia*), cancelled debt slavery, repatriated

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[350] "Hubris," *hubris,* and *hybris* all refer to the same concept. Different authors Romanize the 'υ' in ὕβρις differently.

[351] S.C. Humphreys, "Law, Custom and Culture in Herodotus," *Arethusa* 20, no. 1 (1987): 211.

[352] Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff, "Early Greek Legal Thought," in *A Treatise of Legal Philosophy and General Jurisprudence: Volume 6: A History of the Philosophy of Law from the Ancient Greeks to the Scholastics*, ed. Fred D. Miller Jr and Carrie-Ann Biondi (New York: Springer, 2015), 7.

[353] Gagarin and Woodruff, 20–22.

[354] Interestingly, Solon is credited by the *Suda* with coinings the Delphic maxims, "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess." Tyrtaeus et al., *Greek Elegiac Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries B.C.*, trans. Douglas E. Gerber (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 109, (Solon, T1).

citizens enslaved abroad, and restructured political participation by property class. Solon was also a poet, and he writes about his accomplishments in verse:

> These things I did by the exercise of my power [*kratos*], blending together force [*bie*] and justice [*dike*], and I persevered to the end as I promised. I wrote laws [*thesmous*] for the lower and upper classes alike, providing straight legal processes for each person. If another had taken up the goad as I did, a man who gave bad counsel and was greedy, he would not have restrained the masses [*demos*]. For if I had been willing to do what was pleasing to their opponents and in turn whatever the others [i.e. the masses] planned for them, this city would have been bereft of many men. For that reason I set up a defence on every side and turned about like a wolf among a pack of dogs.[355]

In Solon, we have one of the first clear instances of the ideas that laws can bind together and protect the *polis*—an idea that Heraclitus will have much to say about.

As we can see from Solon's reference to "straight" legal process above, legal discourse during the Archaic period was, as S.C. Humphreys puts it, "about staying in line."[356] The purpose of law and legal judgments was to ensure that people did not go beyond the limits of appropriate conduct. We can see this, for example, in the concerns about straight (*ithus*) versus crooked (*skolion*) judgments in Homer and Hesiod.[357] This contrast formed part of the foundation of the Greek concept of procedural justice. Litigants would state their grievances publicly in front of the community and either a small group or a single respected individual would "judge" the case and provide the "straightest" resolution. Unlike modern legal systems, "[t]he entire process [was] oral: Litigants speak their cases, judges speak their settlements, and the members of the crowd voice their feelings. It is a characteristically Greek scene with substantial community participation, turbulent but

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[355] Tyrtaeus et al., 159 (Solon, Fr. 36).

[356] S.C. Humphreys, "The Discourse of Law in Archaic and Classical Greece," *Law and History Review* 6, no. 2 (1988): 466, https://doi.org/10.2307/743689.

[357] Humphreys, 468.

still orderly."[358] In such a setting, "[c]rooked judgments are a form of *hybris*, of overstepping the bounds of proper behavior (cf. *hyper*, beyond)."[359]

As we saw in Chapter 3, the word "*hubris*" was associated with not only violent behavior, but with other kinds of "boundary crossing" like greed for gain, and the excessive exercise of power. Indeed, Solon blamed the crisis that precipitated his constitutional reforms "on the rich and powerful, who fail to limit their desire for wealth and their exercise of power"[360] with "no regard for the august foundations of Justice."[361] This latter feature, the arbitrary use of power, was a constant source of anxiety in archaic Greek communities. Humphreys suggests that this anxiety was bound up with the development of the *polis* itself:

> The development of the state, of the conception of a public sphere of action and interests, was closely bound up with the development of rules for legitimizing, sharing, and limiting power by dividing responsibilities between elected officeholders who served for a fixed term, usually in collegiate groups between two and ten in number. However, early laws betray constant fear that officeholders will refuse to abdicate when their term ends, or will not enforce the rules for which they are responsible.[362]

This tension helped create the contrast between arbitrary exercises of power on the one hand and the rule of law on the other.

It would not be until Thucydides in the late fifth century that *nomos* would come to mean primarily written law "and that the Athenians start to make a distinction between *nomoi*, which have permanent general validity, and decrees, *psephismata*, which deal with individuals or with specific situations."[363] It is in between these two periods that we must contextualize Heraclitus. Appropriately for the philosopher most associated with change, during his time the use of *nomos* was

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[358] Gagarin and Woodruff, "Early Greek Legal Thought," 9.

[359] Humphreys, "The Discourse of Law in Archaic and Classical Greece," 468.

[360] Humphreys, 469.

[361] Tyrtaeus et al., *Greek Elegiac Poetry*, 115 (Solon, Fr. 4).

[362] Humphreys, "The Discourse of Law in Archaic and Classical Greece," 470.

[363] Humphreys, 473.

still in flux. Heraclitus would take up many of the same concerns as Solon. In other words, Heraclitus was concerned with *hubris*, justice, and of course law (*nomos*) itself.

A. Heraclitus' Understanding of Law (Nomos)

In the preceding section we saw that law (*nomos*) in the ancient Hellenic world was a developing concept that referred variously to ways of life and to laws which preserved these ways of life. As I have been arguing, the role of law (*nomos*) in the *polis* was chief among Heraclitus' political concerns. One of his most extensive treatments on the nature and importance of law (*nomos*) is also one of the most discussed fragments. DK114: **Those who speak with their mind** (*xun noôi*) **must rely** (*iskhurizesthai*) **on what is common** (*xunôi*) **for all, just as a city does on its law, and much more strongly** (*iskhurterôs*). **For all human laws are nourished** (*tréphontai*) **by one law, the divine one: for it dominates as much as it wants to, and it suffices for all, and there is some left over.** As usual, the fragment is riddled[364] with ambiguity, poetic language, and puns which make it difficult to interpret.

The main questions regarding this fragment are (1) how to construe the comparison made by *iskhurterôs*, and (2) how to translate *tréphontai*. Regarding the first, Kahn and Kirk seem to agree that the comparison is to the detriment of the law of the *polis*. In other words, they take him to be "implying that stronger support is available to seekers of understanding who rely on 'what is common' than a city can get from its law."[365] Schofield, however, thinks that Heraclitus is plain in other fragments that the common (*xunôi*) disclosed by the *logos* is clearly the best way to understand the structure of nature, etc. He suggests, in effect, that the comparison in strength is not between *nomos* and *xunôi* but between the capacities of the seekers themselves. That is to say that "[i]t comes down to a question of the differential in the strength required of those who would avail themselves

[364] Pun not *originally* intended but retained as apropos.

[365] Malcolm Schofield, "Heraclitus on Law (Fr.114 DK)," *Rhizomata* 3, no. 1 (2015): 57.

of such support: the ἰσχὺς of citizens in comparison with that of individuals seeking understanding, rather than that of the resource – law or 'what is common' – on which they can rely."[366] If you want to know how the *polis* works you look to its *nomos*, if you want to know how everything works, you look to what is common (*xunôi*). The latter is more difficult than the former.

In translating *tréphontai,* most translators have opted for something like "are nourished by." But this may be a poor choice. Mourelatos and Schofield agree that Heraclitus' Greek is not the "colloquial Ionic of fifth and fourth century writers, but a language much more charged, much more monumental, often deliberately archaic and bearing on the epic language of Homer and Hesiod."[367] Drawing on that epic poetic idiom, Mourelatos argues that it is "probable that the core idea in τρέφω is '"to shelter, to protect, to keep safe, to preserve intact,"' especially where such protection and shelter is absolutely vital for survival."[368] This suggests that *tréphontai*

> … portrays human laws as young, immature, unfledged, green, tender, and weak: utterly dependent on the divine (law)—which explains the qualification καὶ πολὺ ισχυροτέρως. We should translate not "are nourished by" but "are under wardship to." The divine (law) is the τροφός of institutions: it guards their integrity; preserves them. It is in this sense that we should understand the Homeric διοτρεφὴς (the fosterling of Zeus, the ward of Zeus), which is the obvious archetype of Heraclitus' formulation.[369]

If we take Mourelatos' and Schofield's suggestions into account, we get a translation that goes something like this: "Those who speak with their mind must rely on what is common more strongly than a city does on its law. For all human laws are under wardship to the one law, the divine one: for it dominates as much as it wants to, and it suffices for all, and there is some left over." In other words, "[h]uman law is not merely human. It is maintained by divine power, which accomplishes

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[366] Schofield, 57.

[367] Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, "Heraclitus, FR. 114," *The American Journal of Philology* 86, no. 3 (1965): 260–61; Schofield, "Heraclitus on Law (Fr.114 DK)," 53.

[368] Mourelatos, "Heraclitus, FR. 114," 263–64.

[369] Mourelatos, 264.

whatever is the divine will."[370] *Poleis* are strengthened by their laws because their laws are maintained by the divine. [371]

This extended analysis of DK114 tell us something important about Heraclitus's view of *nomos*. He believes that it is so important that it has divine support—I am inclined to follow Kahn in seeing "[i]n his defence of human *nomoi* … [a reaction against] against an early version of cultural relativism, provoked by the extensive Greek contacts with older civilisations that began in the Orientalising period (eight and seventh centuries B.C.)."[372] Such contacts would have called into question the validity of Greek customs, while at the same time forcing Greeks to think of them as *their* customs for the first time. Heraclitus and later thinkers felt pressured to defend these customs as non-arbitrary.

But although Heraclitus concludes that laws and legal processes are not arbitrary, this does not mean that they are free of conflict. This returns us to DK80: **One must know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things come about by strife and constraint.** Here Heraclitus is trying to convey the apparently paradoxical "idea that the essence of justice is not permanence but a dynamic process of adversarial competition."[373] Put another way, *dikê* in both the political and cosmic senses is analogous to "a reciprocal series of lawsuits through which balance is maintained between opposing forces as in no-fault automobile insurance."[374]

This is not the only example of Heraclitus' connection between conflict and law. We can see this same emphasis on the conflictual nature of law in other fragments that, on a surface reading, have no connection to either law or politics. Consider, DK11: **Every beast is driven to pasture**

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[370] Schofield, "Heraclitus on Law (Fr.114 DK)," 56.

[371] Schofield, 54.

[372] Kahn, "Pre-Platonic Ethics," 37.

[373] Gagarin and Woodruff, "Early Greek Legal Thought," 13.

[374] Humphreys, "The Discourse of Law in Archaic and Classical Greece," 472. The conflictual nature of *dike* is a topic which we will discuss in greater detail in subsection B below.

[*németai*] **by blows** [*plēgē*]. At first glance, this appears to be a gnomic statement about animal behavior, or perhaps a comment on human nature. It seems to have nothing to do with law. On this interpretation, the "blow" is the admonishment of people like Heraclitus who are trying to wake people up from their ignorant torpor. Heraclitus' words are metaphorically goading us into good behavior. Another approach is to give DK11 a metaphysical meaning. Kahn notes that this fragment and DK125 (**A *kukeôn* too separates out if it is not stirred.**) both emphasize the benefits of motion and action.[375] If the herd is not made to move to the pasture they will graze where they are until there is nothing left to graze. The word, for "blow," the poetic *plēgē*, is an allusion to the "stroke of Zeus" (i.e. his thunderbolt).[376] And the word for "beast," *herpetòn,* refers to "creeping things" and is often used by the gods in Homer to refer to humanity.[377]

However, Heraclitus, ever the purveyor of plural meanings, has more in mind here. Robinson points out that the word *németai* ("drive to pasture") is cognate with the noun *nomós* (pasture) which is similar to the word for law or custom (*nómos*). Indeed, these words differed only by the accent, an unwritten feature of Ancient Greek. In writing, the words would have looked the same. Thus one rendering might be that "it takes a thunderbolt to lead men to law." We find a similar analogy in Book I of the *Republic* where Thrasymachus uses "shepherds" as a metaphor for rulers or lawgivers that metaphorically "fatten" and "fleece" those under their care.[378] Here it is used more benevolently, as surely animals away from pasture would starve.

DK11 also has connections to DK51 and DK52 which refer to "harmony" or "attunement" (*harmonia*) because *nomos* also meant "a style of song with a prescribed *harmonia* (tuning) and definite

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375 Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: A New Arrangement and Translation of the Fragments with Literary and Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 194.

376 Kahn, 194.

377 Kahn, 65.

378 Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, trans. G. M. A. Grube (Hackett Publishing, 1975), 19–20 (343b - 344c).

rhythm."[379] Thus we could poetically render the fragment as "it takes a blow to create harmony among men." In addition, *plēgē* can also refer to the "blow" of the plectrum against the strings of the lyre.[380] Picture Zeus playing human society like a lyre or zither; an image which fits nicely into Heraclitus' use of theological imagery in other fragments.

Whatever way one chooses to translate it, DK11 evokes another conflictual aspect of law. People will not always follow beneficent norms on their own; they must be guided to them in some way. This guidance is analogous to Zeus shepherding animals to pasture. If people will not seek out *nomos,* then it is the role of politics to get them there. This means punishments as an inducement to keep to *nomos*. Thus *nomos*, which prevents internal conflict must sometimes be supported by using conflict (i.e. punishment).

DK11 is not the only apparently non-political fragment that my framework can expose as political. DK125 - **A *kukeôn* too separates out if it is not stirred,** I submit, also has a potentially political meaning – one that will require more discussion than DK11. To understand this fragment, we must understand the connection of the *kukeôn* in DK11 to the Mysteries we discussed in Chapter 3 above.

The Eleusinian *mystai* were required to drink the *kukeon* to break their fast[381] and swearing that one had done so was part of the oath mentioned by Clement of Alexandria in the last chapter. It is the drink that the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* claims that the goddess herself broke her fast with:

> Metanaeira offered a cup of honey-sweet wine,
> But Demeter refused it. It was not right, she said,
> for her to drink red wine; then she bid them mix barley
> and water with soft mint [pennyroyal] and gave her to drink.
> Metaneira made and gave the drink to the goddess as she bid.
> Almighty Deo received it for the sake of the rite.[382]

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[379] Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3 edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1047.

[380] As in Republic 531b. Credit goes to Josh Wilburn for pointing this out.

[381] Cosmopoulos, *Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 19–20.

It symbolically links humanity with the goddess as it is a human food; in other words, a food usually unsuitable for gods.[383] It is also a food that seems indelibly associated with Heraclitus. Epicurus called Heraclitus "*Kukêtês*." [i.e. "*Kukeôn*-drinker" or "Agitator"].[384] In his *Moralia* Plutarch tells the following story about Heraclitus as an illustration of the virtue of being laconic:

> And is not the god [Apollo] himself fond of conciseness and brevity in his oracles, and is he not called Loxias because he avoids prolixity rather than obscurity? And are not those who indicate by signs, without a word, what must be done, praised and admired exceedingly? So Heracleitus, when his fellow-citizens asked him to propose some opinion about concord [*homonoia*], mounted the platform, took a cup of cold water, sprinkled it with barley-meal, stirred it with penny-royal, drank it up, and departed …[385]

Plutarch takes the lesson to be that citizens should "be satisfied with whatever they happen upon and not to want expensive things is to keep cities in peace and concord."[386] Plutarch's interpretation is clearly wrong, however. The only thing that suggests anything to do with not desiring "expensive things" is the *kukeon* itself, which had a reputation for being a drink of the poorer agricultural classes.[387] It is Plutarch's own interpretive leap that connects this fact with the idea of concord (*homonoia*). Yet, the only instance in the fragments where Heraclitus mentions the *kukeon* explicitly is DK125—a fragment with no connection to avoiding luxury. I believe that Foley is closer to the truth when she writes that Heraclitus "may also be commenting on the concord produced by this simple drink among the disparate (normally unmixable) initiates in the Mysteries."[388]

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382 Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 13 (Homeric Hymn, 206-211).

383 Foley, 88.

384 Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III*, 273; Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bks. 10.6-8.

385 Plutarch, *Plutarch: Moralia, Volume VI*, trans. W. C. Helmbold (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1939), 447 (Moralia, 511c).

386 Plutarch, 447.

387 Theophrastus, Herodas, and Sophron, *Theophrastus: Characters. Herodas: Mimes. Sophron and Other Mime Fragments.*, trans. Jeffrey Rusten and I. C. Cunningham, 2nd ed. edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003), 61 (Characters, 4).

388 Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 47.

Accordingly, I submit that whatever else DK125 means, like DK11 it is also a statement about politics. Many kinds of citizens made up a *polis*. Individually and as classes, they all vied for more control and influence over the others. When this struggle went terribly wrong it expressed itself as *hubris* and *stasis* as we have discussed above. Heraclitus is saying that if citizens are to be in concord [*homonoia*, lit. "like-minded"] with one another they must mix together to create something new, something shared (*xynos*). In the case of the barley, water, and pennyroyal, the shared product is the *kukeon*. In the case of citizens, the shared product is the *polis* itself. Just as the *logos* is common (*xynos*), so too the *polis*. In inquiry into nature and into politics, the common is our goal.

The common, however, like the *kukeon* is vulnerable and ephemeral. If nobody stirs a *kukeon*, its ingredients separate out, some ingredients rising to the top and others to the bottom. The two opposite states of the *kukeon* (mixed and unmixed) are analogous to two states of the *polis*: concord (*homonoia*) and civil war (*stasis*). Plato similarly picks these two as opposites in the Republic when Socrates tells Thrasymachus that "injustice has the power"

> … first, to make whatever it arises in—whether it is a city, a family, an army, or anything else—incapable of achieving anything as a unit, because of the civil wars and differences it creates, and, second, it makes that unit an enemy to itself and to what is in every way its opposite, namely, justice.[389]

This, at least, is a point of agreement between Plato and Heraclitus. A *polis* cannot function properly if its citizens are at cross-purposes. In the words attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "We must, indeed, all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." Where they differ is their solution to this problem. Plato thought the solution was a system of government where a sort of rational hierarchy harnessed individual ability for the benefit of the state. A well-governed *polis* uses individual differences through specialization of labor, but theoretically eradicates their tendency to cause internal conflict through that separation.

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[389] Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, 28 (351e9 -352a3).

Heraclitus, on the other hand, seems to have thought that the solution was having good citizens—that is, ones interested in the common good. He advises that if we want to protect the common, we must personally experience it. We cannot know what that is if we separate out into groups by interest or by abilities. If we want concord (*homonoia*) in our *polis*, we must mix together to discern what the common is. The law (*nomos*) is the most obvious thing that forces the "ingredients" of the *polis* to mix. It is the most obvious thing that diverse groups in a *polis* have in common since it is both an expression of what is distinctive about a *polis* and the glue that holds it together as a *polis*. It is the outcome of internal fights (i.e. enactment of laws in response), and it is how they are settled (i.e. punishment for hubris). *Nomos* is something which is fought over (in the courts) and fought for (against external enemies).

We can see a clearer version idea of what Heraclitus is getting at in DK 125 in DK44: **The people** [*dēmon*] **must fight for their law** [*nomos*] **just as for their city wall.** Walls were an important political and social feature of most *poleis*. As Hansen points out, the association between city walls and the city itself is so strong that it is probable that the original meaning of the Greek word *polis was* "stronghold."[390] Camp observes that "fortifications represent by far the greatest physical expression of public, communal participation, whether we think in terms of money, labor, or organization."[391] Building walls was not cheap or easy. Their very presence suggests the existence of a shared endeavor, common set of customs and values, a *nomos* in the broadest sense of the word.

Some write off DK44 as a commonplace like the aphorism ascribed to the sixth century Lesbian poet Alcaeus (*Alkaios*): "Not stone nor timber, nor the craft of the joiner make the polis, but whosesoever are men who know how to keep themselves safe, there are walls and there a

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[390] Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Polis as a Citizen-State," in *The Ancient Greek City-State: Symposium on the Occasion of the 250th Anniversary of the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters July, 1-4 1992*, vol. 1 (Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1993), 9.

[391] John McK. Camp II, "Walls and the Polis," in *Polis and Politics: Studies in Ancient Greek History*, ed. Thomas Heine Nielsen, Lene Rubinstein, and Pernille Flensted-Jensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 47.

polis"[392] Note the association between the citizens and the walls. They define the *polis* like building blocks. This is what the inept Athenian general Nikias was trying to invoke in his 413 B.C.E. speech during the Sicilian campaign that "Men make the city and not walls or ships without men in them."[393] This trope is also what Aeschylus appeals to in the *Persians*: "While [Athens] has her men, her defences [*herkos*, lit. fence, wall] are secure."[394]

But notice what is different about Heraclitus' fragment from these other sayings. Heraclitus is not identifying the walls and the people, but the walls and *nomos*. He is subtly playing on, instead of simply repeating, the trope to emphasize how important *nomos* is. *Nomos* is so important it has the same defensive and definitional role as city walls do. But that is not all. Consistent with his conflictual interpretation of *nomos*, Heraclitus does not simply identify *nomos* and the city wall, he says that the people must *fight* for it. *Nomos* is not enough to protect the *polis* by itself. The people must actively protect it to ensure it protects them. Just as they must "mix" to ensure concord, they must *fight* to preserve what is common.

Here we must return to the problem of *hubris*. As one can guess DK43 complements DK44. According to DK43, **One must extinguish arrogant violence** (*hubris*) **more than a conflagration.** Whereas DK44 is concerned with external threats to the *polis*, DK43 is concerned with *internal* threats to the *polis*. In its early development, the *nomos* of the *polis* was quite loose and informal. As Gehrke explains

> These loose structures contributed to the almost unchecked expression of the considerable potential for conflict inherent in these communities (Van Wees 1992). Bitter confrontations among the wealthy and notables which sometimes had catastrophic social and economic

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[392] Camp II, 48.

[393] Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley, Touchstone ed. edition (New York: Free Press, 1998), bk. 7.77.7.

[394] Aeschylus, *Aeschylus, I, Persians. Seven against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*, trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 55 (Persians, 348).

> consequences and tended to result in tyranny, could not be controlled by traditional means.[395]

The response was to formalize *nomos* in the broad sense (of culture/way of life) into *thesmos* ('what is laid down'), *rhêtra* ('what is said'), and finally *nomos* in the narrow sense (of written law), under the sanction of religion.[396] This order based on law, this "nomocracy," was meant "to establish secure foundations for peaceful cohabitation."[397] The goal was thus to establish agreed upon boundaries for behavior in the *polis*.

In this context, *hubris* was a threat to the *polis* because it was a transgression against boundaries or limits. Recall that Solon saw the crisis he resolved in terms of *hubris*. If, as our sources tell us, the Ephesians called Aristarchos to give Ephesus a Solonic constitution when Heraclitus was a child, then it is unsurprising that Heraclitus would share some of the normative views about law that motivated Solon. *Hubris*, the transgression of boundaries, leads to unbalanced internal violence, threatening the *polis* itself. It threatens to blossom into civil war (*stasis*). By telling us that it is more important to "extinguish" this political threat to *nomos* than the physical threat posed by a conflagration, Heraclitus is signaling that he shares the primary concern of developing political theory.

Note that just as the "beasts" need to be "**driven to pasture by blows**" in DK11, and the law (*nomos*) needs to be fought for like the city wall in DK 44, DK43 supposes that *nomos* cannot protect itself, the people must protect it. Inaction in the face of *hubris* is as foolish as inaction in the face of a conflagration.[398] A raging fire knows no boundaries, it destroys indiscriminately. It is a

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[395] Hans-Joachim Gehrke, "States," in *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece*, ed. H. A. Shapiro (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 396.

[396] Gehrke, 396.

[397] Gehrke, 396.

[398] It seems strange that Heraclitus—who elsewhere makes fire a central idea or metaphor in his cosmology—should cast fire in a negative light in this fragment. I believe that this is not a contradiction, but a qualification. "Fire" is a stand-in for conflict and change. *Hubris* creates conflict within a *polis*. It follows that *hubris* would be like a fire. Heraclitus, however, recognizes that some kinds of conflict, unchecked, destroy the solidarity that holds a *polis* together. *Hubris* is one sort of conflict that that can threaten the *polis* in this way. Accordingly, though *hubris* is like a raging fire, it is a fire

threat to an entire community. Similarly, *hubris*, especially that *hubris* that develops into civil war (*stasis*), threatened to overthrow all stability in the *polis*.[399] Heraclitus maintains that to protect what we have in common, we must stand against the raging fire of hubris that threatens metaphorically to burn the *polis* down.

The fragments also show that Heraclitus' praise of *nomos* was no mere traditionalism. He seems to be aware of the need for political and legal reform. DK33 proclaims that **It is also law to follow the plan** [*boulē*] **of the one** [*henós*]." This fragment is hard to interpret because of the words *boulē* and *henós*. *Boulē* could mean "plan" as in the "plan of Zeus" (*Dios boulē*) described in the Iliad.[400] As a practical matter, this is how most translators render the word in English. However, the word can also refer to "(1) deliberation and (2) the council, as a constitutional body exercising some executive power, both in oligarchies and in democracies."[401] *Henós*, typical of Heraclitean ambiguity, can either mean "one man" or simply "the one."[402] Thus the fragment can mean "it is also law to obey the (plan/deliberations/council) of (one man/the one)." On the cosmic level, this *henós* ("one") could refer to the *logos*. If Schofield is correct, then Heraclitus is saying that "anyone who obeys [a city's] law thereby obeys the will of one. In other words, 'political application' and 'cosmic allusion' … [are] not alternatives … but different aspects of what one might call Heraclitus' cosmic politics."[403] On the purely political level, grounded in historical context, it could mean that Heraclitus

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that must be stopped. As I will argue in the next chapter, Heraclitus is similar to Machiavelli in that his theory of conflict is something like institutionalized class conflict. *Hubris* plainly threatens that theory because it threatens to destroy all institutions.

[399] This threat was especially severe in oligarchies where private disputes between oligarchs could result in civil war or even constitutional revolution. *See* Matthew Simonton, "Stability and Violence in Classical Greek Democracies and Oligarchies," *Classical Antiquity* 36, no. 1 (April 1, 2017): 62–65.

[400] Homer, *Homer: The Iliad: Volume I, Books 1-12*, ed. William F. Wyatt, trans. A. T. Murray, 2 edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1924), bk. 1.5.

[401] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 181.

[402] Kahn, 181.

[403] Schofield, "Heraclitus on Law (Fr.114 DK)," 54.

approves of legal reformers—men like Solon or Kleisthenes, who singlehandedly changed the *nomoi* of their *poleis.*[404]

Heraclitus' contemporaries may have considered this a radical idea. Consider that during his lifetime *nomos* was just starting to take on the meaning of "written law." Previously and after, as we discussed above, the word could mean everything from "behavior" to "established custom." In effect, Heraclitus is asserting his approval for a specialized new use of the term and for the idea of legal reform in the *polis*. This is more plausible, again, if Aristarchos gave Ephesus a Solonic constitution when Heraclitus was a child. This issue would have been divisive, particularly among aristocrats. Heraclitus lived during a period described by Gehrke as marked by

> …the constant and alert willingness of the rich and influential to demonstrate their power and strength and to display and protect their honor, as well as their inability to yield and compromise. Again and again, this disposition led to conflicts which often escalated into violent confrontations, particularly in the seventh and sixth centuries. Nor was it only the feuds within the elite that proved dangerous, but still more their collective efforts to establish themselves as a ruling class, and the aspirations of single members to rise above the community by establishing a tyranny. Against all these efforts stood the law, "the friend of the weak" as Friedrich Schiller put it.[405]

By standing in favor of legal reform, Heraclitus was, in effect staking out his position in this process by siding with the "friend of the weak."

DK33 also has affinities with DK49: **One man, for me, is ten thousand** [*murioi*]**, if he is the best** [*aristos*]**.** The word for "ten thousand," *murios*, was the poetic term for numberless, countless, or infinite. In other words, Heraclitus is trying to emphasize the value of someone with truly superlative skill. Such a truly *aristos* person would be the best candidate for a legal reformer. The line of reasoning may have been something like this. Reformation requires a singular vision so

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[404] If Hermodorus was a *nomothete*, as some have speculated, this fragment could be linked to DK121. More on this in Section II below.

[405] Gehrke, "States," 408.

one man or one group of men must be responsible for it (DK33). If a single man is the reformer, he must be the best man for the task, lest he fail to reform the *polis* due to his own inadequacy.

In this section we have seen that Heraclitus is concerned with the role that law (*nomos*) plays in holding a *polis* together. We have also seen that Heraclitus unique views about conflict inform his views about *nomos*. Since *nomoi* differ from *polis* to *polis* it would be easy to mistake this for cultural relativism. Heraclitus, however, is clear that a *polis' nomos* is supported by the divine. *Nomos* is thus a political analogue to the mystical experience of initiates which takes private individuals and makes them into a group with a common experience. The goal of *nomos* is to alleviate the political disruption cause by the clash of private interests and prevent the outbreak of *stasis* (civil war).

But *nomos* for Heraclitus is not *merely* a tool to end conflict, but a source of conflict itself. Laws prevent and punish internal violence like *hubris*, but they require conflict to enforce and preserve them. This latter sort of conflict, however, draws the focus away from private grievance and private power to the common good of the *polis*; it moves people away from things to fight against each other over to something they can fight for together.

If the situation in the *polis* is particularly bad, it may need legal reform. Whether this reform comes from a wise council or a wise lawgiver does not matter. What matters is that they are the best (*aristos*) person or persons for the job. Such a reformer would be aware of the need for a legal structure which emphasizes the common good and deemphasizes sources of internal division. They should be someone who knows that internal conflict can only be prevented by encouraging the disparate types of citizens to "mix" and pursue their common rather than private good. Conflict cannot be eradicated, but it can be harnessed to positive ends. Indeed, conflict is not just ineradicable, but some form of conflict is valuable.

B. Heraclitus' Understanding of Justice (Dike)

Nowhere is the value of conflict to political life more clearly stated than in Heraclitus' comments about *dike* (justice). Consider DK23: **They would not know the name of Justice if these things** [i.e. unjust actions?] **did not exist.** This is a strange statement without the bracketed portion. It remains strange unless we understand the Greek legal process. As discussed above, the process was a "turbulent, but still orderly" affair whose aim was a "straight judgment" that would restore the limits that were transgressed in generating the dispute. This process, of course, was fundamentally conflictual. But the conflict did not end there. In the Greece of Heraclitus' day, the "judge handed down a ruling, but was not responsible for carrying it out."[406] Anybody that "won the case had to carry the ruling out himself. He had no more than a legal claim, but at least he was now entitled to realize it by means of 'permitted self-help.'"[407] It does not take a legal scholar to see that this situation just "encouraged the continuation of conflicts on another level — and prompted more lawsuits."[408] Justice, the corrective to transgression, would not exist without transgression.

Accordingly, Heraclitus concludes that if it were not for *eris* (strife, conflict), men would not know justice (*dike*) because *eris* is inextricably intertwined with justice. Indeed, Heraclitus explicitly says this in DK80: **One must know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things come about by strife and constraint** [*chreōn*]**.** The word translated as "constraint" is the Greek *chreōn* which means "necessity" or "that which must be." It has the same root as the Greek *chreōs* which means "that which one needs must pay," obligation or debt. If strife is the tendency to "go beyond" a limit or boundary, then *chreōn* is the "necessary" recompense or restitution for that transgression. But if a debt must be paid, more strife is likely to arise in collecting it.

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406 Gehrke, 402.

407 Gehrke, 402.

408 Gehrke, 402.

This connection between strife and justice is also explicit in DK94: **The sun will not overstep** [*hyperbesetai*] **measures, otherwise, the Erinyes, Justice's helpers, will find it out.** The Erinyes (the root of this name is *eris*) are the personification of strife's connection with personified Justice. Here the cosmos is seen as a *polis*, where the *hybris* of the sun for "overstep[ping its] measures," is punished by the strife that attends justice. The Erinyes (usually translated into English as "Furies") are chthonic[409] deities that punish humans that break oaths, murder kin, etc.[410] In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* they are the spirits of vengeance that plague Orestes after he kills his mother and her lover for their murder of his father Agamemnon. Having chthonic goddesses punish a heavenly body symbolically points to there being an order to the cosmos. It also further indicates that no one, no matter how lofty, is beyond justice. This cosmic justice is of a piece with Heraclitus' assurance that the *nomos* of the *polis* is supported by the divine (DK114).[411]

DK28 parallels this cosmic justice: **Justice will seize hold of those who fabricate lies and those who bear witness to them.** Dishonesty is a form of boundary violation, of *hybris*, and thus well-functioning *polis* cannot tolerate it. Hence we see in *Republic*, Book I that the first definition of justice offered is "speaking the truth and paying whatever debts one has incurred."[412] Indeed, Kahn explicitly connects DK28 with DK94.[413] Heraclitus is either thinking that some form of divine retribution will punish the liar, or he is saying something like our modern phrase "the truth will come out." Lies are unsustainable in the long run. It also is one of several indications in the fragments that Heraclitus is not saying that we should get into conflict for conflict's sake. Lies can

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[409] Gods associated with the souls of dead humans and other things below the earth. Arthur Fairbanks, "I.--the Chthonic Gods of Greek Religion.: I. Ii. Iii.," *The American Journal of Philology (1880-1910); Baltimore* 21, no. 3 (July 1, 1900): 7.

[410] Fairbanks, 1.

[411] See the beginning of Section II.A above.

[412] Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, 5–6 (331c-d).

[413] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 212. DK94: **The sun will not overstep** [*hyperbesetai*] **measures, otherwise, the Erinyes, Justice's helpers, will find it out.**

generate conflict, hubris can generate conflict, but they both endanger the common (*xynos*). Accordingly, lying and hubris are unjust. Again, notice that "Justice" is active in this fragment. It will "seize hold of" (*katalepsetai*) liars like a warrior conquering territory. Indeed, the root of this word is the same as that used in the following passage of Herodotus: "[Cylon] put on the air of one who aimed at tyranny, and gathering a company of men of like age, he attempted to seize [*katalabein*] the citadel."[414] This subtlety hints again at the connection between *eris* and *dike*.

Accordingly, we can see that for Heraclitus conflict in either the *cosmos* or the *polis* is not only ineradicable, but valuable. Indeed, we would have no knowledge of justice if we never came into conflict over injustices. Further, the only way to punish conflict-generating behaviors is to use another kind of conflict (i.e. the courts, self-help, etc.), and even at the level of the *polis* the Furies are the (metaphoric) helpers of Justice.

To summarize we see that the development of the Greek understanding of law and justice during the archaic period and the early classical period deeply influenced Heraclitus. His views track the development of *nomos* from the broad notion of custom, to the narrow notion of "law." In addition, both by the turbulence of Greek legal practice, with its endless reciprocal lawsuits, and the constitutional and international changes that occurred during his lifetime affected the way that he thought about politics and ethics in general. We have seen that Heraclitus carefully applies his principle that the "*logos* is *xynos* (common)" to politics/ethics. If the *logos* is what is common, then it follows that we should behave in a way that benefits the common. But since the political embodiment of what is common, *nomos*, is fragile, it must be fought for against external and internal threats. Apart from the physical defense of the *polis*, this protection is rendered through a special

[414] Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume III, Books V-VII:*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1922), bk. 5.71.

kind of strife (*eris*) called justice (*dike*). Justice requires the active discouragement and punishment of behavior damaging to the common good of the *polis*.

But what sort of constitution did Heraclitus think would best exemplify his views about politics? In other words, was Heraclitus a supporter of oligarchy or democracy? In modern terms, what was his ideological affiliation? I discuss this issue in the next section.

III. Oligarchs and Democrats: Developing Political Ideologies of Heraclitus' Time

Placing Heraclitus on the ideological spectrum from oligarch to democrat is a thorny problem. It is natural to assume that given his concern for the common good of the *polis*, there would be a constitutional arrangement that he prefers. Most commentators, noting his aristocratic background, and his despairing statements about how few people have understanding, tend to see him as leaning in an oligarchic or aristocratic direction. Kahn, for example, concludes that, based DK104, he "had small sympathy for democracy."[415] But is this a fair characterization of Heraclitus? As with everything else in this essay, context suggests an answer. Simply put, in this case context cautions agnosticism.

A. The Meanings of "Oligarch" and "Democrat"

First, we need to know what "oligarch" and "democrat" meant. Both ideologies were still developing in this period, so we cannot be precise, but we do have some idea what the words might have meant in a broad sense to their supporters. The words for "oligarch" and "democrat" "ὀλιγαρχικός and δημοκρατικός - are not found before the end of the fifth century, the time when the contrast between oligarchy and democracy began to take on ideological dimensions."[416] In other words, the conflict did not take on ideological dimensions until *after* the death of Heraclitus. The

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[415] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 3.

[416] Martin Ostwald, "Oligarchy and Oligarchs in Ancient Greece," in *Polis and Politics: Studies in Ancient Greek History*, ed. Thomas Heine Nielsen, Lene Rubinstein, and Pernille Flensted-Jensen (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 387.

first use of "democrat" is attributed to the speech writer Lysias who claimed that "no human being is by nature oligarchical or democratic, but whatever constitution brings advantage to an individual is the one he would like to see established."[417]

Martin Ostwald sees this as evidence for two things: (1) that although the ideas of the two forms of government existed much early in the fifth century, the terms were perceived as ideological only during Lysias' time; and (2) "ideology is not yet regarded as a matter of political principle but of convenience: men are not oligarchical or democratic 'by nature' (φύσει), but on the basis of their personal social and economic interest."[418] But what exactly does (2) mean regarding the definition of oligarchy?) Aristotle describes the ruling class of an oligarchy as *euporoi*.[419] The word *euporos* "is properly rendered as 'well-to-do', or even better 'well-provided with resources.'"[420] In other words, "[t]he size of a citizen's assets determined the degree of his participation in an oligarchy."[421]

If this is correct, then concerns regarding the relative resources of civil servants drove the ideological choice of government. Ostwald finds support for this view by reference to the democratic reforms of Perikles:

> A person had to be εὔπορος, "well-provided with resources" of his own in order to serve the state in a military or civic capacity. This is precisely the reason why Perikles introduced pay for jury duty: the administration of justice could not function democratically without enabling the ἄποροι, "the indigent" who were "not provided with resources", with an allowance that would enable them to take at least one day off for jury duty without jeopardizing their own well-being and that of their families.[422]

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[417] Ostwald, 387.

[418] Ostwald, 387.

[419] Plato describes the same class as *plousioi* (i.e. "wealthy"). As my advisor has been at pains to convince me the difference between the terms is not as important as Ostwald suggests in his essay. This does not, however, render the rest of Ostwald's discussion incorrect as little to nothing depends on this distinction.

[420] Ostwald, "Oligarchy and Oligarchs in Ancient Greece," 389.

[421] Ostwald, 390.

[422] Ostwald, 389.

So, if this is correct, the ideological argument for oligarchy was most likely put in terms like arguments for technocracy today: those who are most able to do *x*, should be the only candidates considered for doing *x*. As Ostwald points out: "No government would proudly proclaim as its aim that it wants to make the rich richer, even if that is, in effect, the result of its policies."[423] At least for the group that came to be known as oligarchs, the question was not one of majority versus minority rule. If this were so, it would be hard to understand why Kolophon was called an oligarchy even though *the majority* of its citizens, before the Lydian invasion, were large estate owners.[424]

It is also dangerous to elide the difference between "oligarchy" and "aristocracy." Some oligarchs may have advocated for their preferred constitution by references to "rule of the best," but this conclusion is more based on our own speculations and reconstructions, "not statements that have come down to us from antiquity."[425] This is not to say that oligarchy could not have been very restrictive and elitist. Gehrke makes this point clear by distinguishing between two types of oligarchy:

> Both have a property qualification for citizenship, mostly in landed property. In one, the τίμημα even for election to office is low enough to make most citizens eligible to a Council and to other offices in such a way that ratification by an Assembly was no more than a formality; in some cases, property qualifications serve as the basis only for military duty; voting is by show of hands rather than by lot; and the terms of public officials are not necessarily limited to one year. In addition to these forms, there is, as in Thucydides and Aristotle, a narrow kind of oligarchy, which completely excludes small landowners, which has a high property requirement and restricts office to a narrow circle, a clique, a family, a clan, whose rule is as autocratic as the rule of a tyrant.[426]

Thus, there were *oligarchikoi* and there were *oligarchikoi*. Some wanted office requirements narrower than others, but their defining quality was the belief that property requirements should determine who could hold those offices.

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[423] Ostwald, 390.

[424] Ostwald, 392.

[425] Ostwald, 393.

[426] Ostwald, 394. See also Gehrke, *Stasis*, 315–20.

Roughly speaking we can talk about oligarchs and democrats in the following way. Oligarchs wanted to limit enfranchisement to a specific group. Though they may have disagreed about how to define this group or how small it should be, they all agreed that property holding should determine political participation. Democrats, on the other hand, wanted to enfranchise all (male) citizens regardless of their property qualifications. This could include (as in the case of Perikles) using city funds to provide compensation for participation the political process to support citizens that could not afford to otherwise. It is to these sorts of features we must look to determine Heraclitus' ideological leanings.

B. The Difficulty of Classifying Heraclitus' Political Views

So did Heraclitus lean towards oligarchy? There is no direct evidence that he did. Mostly there are inferences from the fact that he uses *hoi polloi* and *hoi oligoi* as contrastives when talking about groups of people who understand the *logos*. For example, DK2: **But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*)**, most people** [*hoi polloi*] **live as though they had their own thought** (*phronêsis*)." But as Walter Donlan admits, it was not until the fifth century that we see "[t]he emergence of words which identify social groups as *numerical* entities" (like *hoi polloi* & *oligoi*) which "reveals the aristocracy's need to represent itself as a small, separate, tightly-knit coterie, distinct and remote from the broad, undifferentiated mass."[427] It is possible, but not probable, that Heraclitus was using the words in this socio-political way.

Assumptions about Heraclitus' political allegiances also motivate Vitek's challenge to the authenticity of DK44: **The people** [*dêmon*] **must fight for their law just as for their city wall.** Vitek believes that a "[r]ather suspicious feature" of DK44 "is the positive emphasis on people

[427] Walter Donlan, "Social Vocabulary and Its Relationship to Political Propaganda in Fifth-Century Athens," *Quaderni Urbinati Di Cultura Classica*, no. 27 (1978): 108, https://doi.org/10.2307/20537848. In a footnote on page 98, dashes off a remark that "the social implications are quite evident" in Heraclitus' use of the terms. But this is simply not evident to me. There is no clear indication in these fragments that the "few" that understand him are aristocrats.

(δῆμος) whom Heraclitus usually treated with disgusted loathing, speaking of them as <<the many, the masses>> (οἱ πολλοί)."[428] In other words his argument is that: (1) Heraclitus speaks negatively of the *hoi polloi*, (2) *hoi polloi* and *demos* are equivalent sociopolitical terms, (3) DK44 speaks positively of the *demos*, thus (4) DK44 must not be authentic.

Again, Donlan is helpful here. During the archaic period (i.e. the first part of Heraclitus' life) just about the only word the use of which was restricted to a sociopolitical identifier was *demos*.[429] But the use of number-terms like *hoi polloi* did not take on social significance until the fifth century (the latter half of Heraclitus' life). If we are to believe Vitek's argument, we must assume that Heraclitus' obscure book was in the vanguard of this newer usage of *hoi polloi* instead of *demos* to indicate a sociopolitical group of which he is critical. We might even need to assume that Heraclitus was a pioneer of this usage of *hoi polloi*.

In fact, what we know about political rhetoric in the sixth and fifth centuries suggests the opposite. Even in Athens, "[i]magery applied favourably to the *demos* is hard to find."[430] In fact, one of the few positive images of the *demos* that persists is to compare them to the walls of the *polis*[431]—which, as discussed above, is precisely the trope that Heraclitus is playing with in DK44. It follows that Heraclitus' use of this trope is not good evidence of his views on the *demos*. Consequently, the fragment is probably authentic, but not a clue as to Heraclitus' political ideology. Put another way, we cannot make solid extrapolations about Heraclitus' ideological views from this fragment, authentic or not; further, we have no reason to doubt its authenticity on the basis that Vitek suggests.

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[428] Tomáš Vítek, "Heraclitus, DK 22 B 44 (Frg. 103, Marcovich)," *Emerita* 80, no. 2 (December 30, 2012): 300–301, https://doi.org/10.3989/emerita.2012.15.1101.

[429] Donlan, "Social Vocabulary and Its Relationship to Political Propaganda in Fifth-Century Athens," 104.

[430] R. Brock, "The Emergence of Democratic Ideology," *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte* 40, no. 2 (1991): 161.

[431] Brock, 161.

Considering DK104 might be a more fruitful line of inquiry: **What is their intelligence** [*noos*] **or understanding** [*phrēn*]**? They believe the people's bards** [*demon aiodoisi*] **and take the crowd** [*homilo*] **as their teacher, for they do not know that 'most men are bad' and that the good are few.** This appears to be a clear disparagement of the *demos*, but it is not an unambiguous one. If we are careful, we can see that two features trouble this view: (1) the focus on "people's bards" and the "crowd as their teacher" and (2) what appears to be a quote in the closing clause. Regarding the first, there are numerous examples of Heraclitus' criticism of poets as misleading sources of information (i.e. DK42, 56, 57, 106). So, whoever "they" are, Heraclitus is attacking the popularity of the ideas that "they" are learning; he is not directly attacking the *demos* itself. Heraclitus clearly thinks that it is difficult to attain wisdom, so it is not surprising that he rejects the idea that what is *au courant* is the best way to find wisdom. Although this clause also mentions that "they" take "the crowd as their teacher" Heraclitus does not use *demon* for "crowd"; instead, he uses *homilos*, a word which is a word for crowd that does not necessarily carry any socio-political import. Indeed, in *Republic* Book VI Plato uses it to mean allying or "consorting": "Then the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered and divine [*philosophos homilon kosmios te kai theios*] and despite all the slanders around that say otherwise, himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can."[432] Thus it is far from clear that Heraclitus meant *homilos* to be a condemnation of the *demos* rather than a critique of following popular trends.

Regarding the second matter, it appears the concluding clause is a quote from Bias of Priene. DK39 explicitly mentions this sage approvingly: **In Priene was born Bias, the son of Teutames, who is held in greater account** (*logos*) **than the others.**[433] Diogenes Laertius ascribes the phrase

[432] Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, 174, (500c-d).

[433] Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III* LM11.

"most are worthless" (*hoi polloi kakoi*) to Bias[434] and Heraclitus may be quoting this phrase without attribution in DK104 or DK104 and DK39 may have been originally grouped together in the text. If this is so, then he is simply applying Bias' quote to whatever he is criticizing in DK104. Further, it is unclear if the *hoi polloi* referred to (in DK104) are the poets, the people, or every human being. The broadest interpretation is a global condemnation of all people. The narrowest, which I prefer because of the emphasis on the poets, is a condemnation of confusing the popular with prudent.

DK47 reinforces this restricted view: **Let us not agree in a haphazard way about the most important things** is a fragment that has attracted little comment. Some like Kahn, suggest that it is only a reiteration of themes found in other fragments.[435] Generally, like Robinson, most take it to be a comment on Heraclitus' attitude toward seeking the truth.[436] Laks and Most, however, take "the most important things" to mean politics.[437] Assuming that they are correct, what does this fragment mean? I think if we look at the Greek, we see that he is most probably suggesting that we should make political decisions after serious deliberation and not simply agree in a "haphazard way." The Greek of DK47 is μὴ εἰκῇ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων συμβαλλώμεθα. Literally translated this would mean something like "We should not without plan/purpose/cause throw together/unite the big/important matters/things." We are looking at a similar sentiment to DK104, politics, like wisdom is hard work and cannot be done well without serious intent. We cannot simply rely on "thrown together" ideas; we must consider things carefully.

DK84b: **It is wearisome to work hard** [*mochthein*] **for the same ones** [*tois autois*] **and to be ruled by them** [*archesthai*] is a curious and difficult fragment. If, Robinson[438] and Laks/Most[439] are

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[434] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 177.

[435] Kahn, 106.

[436] T. M. Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments* (University of Toronto Press, 2015), 108.

[437] Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III*, 193,n.1.

[438] Robinson, *Heraclitus: Fragments*, 137.

correct and this fragment has political or sociological import, then we must consider it here. It could refer to the lot of the slave, who must work for his or her masters. But it could also refer to the paradoxical nature of citizen sovereignty wherein we work hard for the state, yet we are the state.

Kahn, on the other hand goes against the grain of other's translation and interprets the final word (*archesthai*) to have its other meaning "to begin" rather than "to be ruled." He thus takes the dative *tois autois* to refer to the "object of toil or cause of suffering, not the person for whom one labors."[440] He prefers to render the fragment as "It is weariness to toil at the same tasks and be always beginning." Kahn, as is his custom, interprets this metaphysically and joins it with DK84a (**Changing, it remains at rest**). This results in a collective reading that we "never to get to the end of the job but toil continually at the same work and thus never find rest by changing."[441] A political interpretation is just as plausible. Something like the *polis* and its *nomos* must continually adapt to changes in internal and external conditions. This construal has the added benefit of using both the meanings of *archesthai*. Double meanings are a hallmark of many Heraclitean fragments.

Whatever the proper interpretation of this fragment, it is impossible to make confident conjectures about Heraclitus' politics from it. We do not know if he meant it as comment, a critique or something else entirely. Without more, we cannot properly contextualize it. Accordingly, I prefer to remain agnostic as to any potential ideological meaning.

One cannot remain agnostic, however, about DK121: "**All the adult Ephesians ought to hang themselves and to leave the city to beardless boys: for they exiled Hermodorus, the one man of them who mas most beneficial, saying, 'Let there not be one man among who is the most beneficial -- otherwise, may he be elsewhere among others.'** We have discussed this fragment elliptically many times in this paper, so I will be brief here. The best theory seems to be

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[439] Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III*, 195.

[440] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 170.

[441] Kahn, 170.

that Hermodorus was some sort of *nomothete* that the Ephesians charged with legal reform after their conquest by the Persian general Mardonius. For whatever reason, he was exiled for not living up to their expectations. Heraclitus, according to Diogenes Laertius, seems to have turned down the same job because Ephesus already had a "bad constitution" (*ponera politeia*).

I can see two possible scenarios. In the first, Ephesus was a Solonic timocracy, and the *polis* charged Hermodorus with converting the city to a democracy under the reforms of Mardonius. When he refused, they exiled him. Heraclitus' critique in DK121 would thus be a swipe at democracy as the form of government fit only for "beardless boys."

The second scenario incorporates two factors ignored by the first: (1) the probability that Heraclitus was suspicious of Persian "reforms," and (2) the historical trend in Ephesus toward neutrality and appeasement of foreign forces. This account follows the other about halfway. In other words, Ephesus was a Solonic timocracy, and it tasked Hermodorus with converting the city to a democracy under the reforms of Mardonius. As part of his reforms, he introduced mechanisms that would mitigate the influence of Persia on office holding, etc. In other words, he did something beneficial (*oneistos*) for the city at the expense of Persia. Given the arc of Ephesian political temperament, this move was seen as a provocation of their Persian overlords, and they banished him. In the same vein, it is improbable that these same Persian overlords would have allowed his exile if he was representing the interests of the Empire in the city.

That Heraclitus was resentful of Persian power is no bare speculation. DK14 in its source from Clement, includes the Persian Magi among those mystery cult practitioners that Heraclitus disdains.[442] Although the letter and the story are probably apocryphal, Diogenes Laertius seems to be drawing on a tradition of Hercalitean anti-Medianism in his story that Heraclitus refused a job with

[442] Kahn, 2; Miltiades Papatheophanes, "Heraclitus of Ephesus, the Magi and the Achaemenids.," *Iranica Antiqua* 20 (1985): 102–3.

the Great King himself.[443] This same tradition is probably the source of the story that Heraclitus persuaded the pro-Persian tyrant Melencomas to abdicate as well. [444]

But even more persuasively, it fits in line with the view expressed in DK 125a: "May your wealth never fail you, men of Ephesus, so that your baseness may be exposed!" Ephesian (if not Ionian) prosperity appears to have been dependent on its careful navigation of foreign policy relations with prosperous empires like Lydia, Persia, and then Athens. In condemning this wealth, Heraclitus may have been condemning the Ephesian willingness to give up their independence whenever doing so filled their coffers. His negative attitude toward the men of Ephesus is thus an expression of patriotic integrity on his part, which shows that he had a more developed sense of politics (from our point of view) than his contemporaries.

Overall, examining the explicit content of his fragments reveals a Heraclitus that is stubbornly difficult to pin down as either an oligarch or a democrat. Even when we examine "themes" in the fragments we find nothing that definitively reveals his affiliation. One such "theme" is an emphasis on the "quiet virtues." While Heraclitus seems to recommend the so-called "quiet virtues" of "justice" and "temperance," he reworks them for his own ends. Thus in DK 112 "'Sound thinking [or moral restraint, *sōphronein*] is the greatest virtue (*aretē*) and the greatest wisdom: to speak truth and act according to nature, knowingly' … the quiet virtue of temperance or self-control (*sōphrosunē*) has been reconstrued as an intellectual insight that anticipates the Socratic-Platonic connection between virtue and knowledge."[445] An emphasis on *sōphrosunē* and *hybris* was part of the propaganda approach taken by late fifth century oligarchs that preferred to stress the supposed virtues of their style of government over democracy. [446] Their democratic opponents,

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[443] Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, vol. 2, bks. 9.13-16.

[444] Clement, *Stromateis, Books 1-3*, 72.

[445] Kahn, "Pre-Platonic Ethics," 32–33.

[446] Brock, "The Emergence of Democratic Ideology," 166.

however, also claimed these virtues for democracy.[447] The chief slogans of ancient democrats were "equality, legality, freedom, and community" in some mixture or other.[448] Indeed, we have seen that legality is a core idea that influenced Heraclitus, so we can see that it is an area where democrats and Heraclitus overlapped in interest.

More interestingly, however, is the role of community. It is an undisputed feature of Heraclitus' thought that he recommends *to xynon* (the common/public/shared) as the way to the *logos*. *To xynon*, however, is simply the Ionic version of the more familiar Attic *to koinon*. In democratic propaganda, "[τ]ὸ κοινόν refers to the state and always expresses an idea of unity; ἐς μέσον likewise implies the public and visible nature of democratic government, particularly in the assembly, and the universal accessibility of information and ideas, in contrast to oligarchic secretiveness."[449] This use of the "common" to imply both open to all and the same for all is certainly a recurring theme in Heraclitus' thinking. Consider just two examples, DK2: "**But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*)**, most people live as though they had their own thought** (*phronêsis*)" and DK113: **Thinking** (*phroneein*) **is common** [*xynon*] **to all**. This is plainly something akin to both "the idea of unity" (*to koinon*) and the "universal accessibility of information and ideas" (*es meson*). Hence, there is a potential connection between these core concepts of late fifth century democratic ideology and Heraclitus' use of similar concepts in the fragments.

Despite this, there is simply not enough to call Heraclitus a democrat. Lacking from his fragments are clear articulations of important democratic ideas like *isonomia* (the combination of equality and the rule of law) and *isegoria* (the combination of equality and freedom). Heraclitus believes in something like the rule of law, but oligarchs did as well. Their slogan was Solon's *eunomia* ("good order"), not the democratic *isonomia* ("equality of political rights"). We do not really know if

[447] Brock, 166.

[448] Brock, 167.

[449] Brock, 167–68.

Heraclitus would have been content with the Solonic timocracy of his youth; he says nothing specific about it. Further, while its plain he believed thinking was open to all, he does not have anything to say on the democratic idea of freedom of speech (*isegoria*).

Now it is possible that such statements simply have not survived. Indeed, no Heraclitean fragment talks about political freedom at all. This is particularly odd since the Greek notions of *eleutheria* and *autonomia* developed in response to the Persian Wars to describe the political freedom of *poleis*.[450] Heraclitus seems to have missed this new trend altogether. It is possible that he was too far away from the locus of its development (i.e. Athens) to feel its influence, but we simply do not know.

I do not mean to conclude that Heraclitus was hostile to the idea of political freedom, just that he does not discuss it explicitly. Indeed, many of his ideas and anecdotes about him implicitly commit him to some notion of *autonomia*. What sense is there to say we should fight for our *nomos* like the city wall, or that our *nomos* is under the guardianship of the divine, if our *nomos* has no political importance, etc. To summarize, if Heraclitus made even vague statements on *isonomia*, *isegoria*, *autonomia*, or *elelutheria*, I would feel more comfortable calling him a democratic-leaning thinker. Since we do not, I cannot go so far.

In short, I do not think we can easily read off Heraclitus' ideological leanings from the surviving fragments. Concomitantly, I reject the view of many commentators that Heraclitus was probably "aristocratic" or "oligarchic" leaning. There is simply too much ambiguity in the fragments themselves and suspect words like *demos*, *polloi*, and *oligoi* were too much in flux during his lifetime to say that he leaned one way or another. Kahn vacillates on this issue but seems to think Heraclitus

[450] Matt Edge, "Freedom (Eleutheria)," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah04116.

was either apolitical or simply opposed to democracy. Where Kahn comes closest too my own view is where he writes of Heraclitus:

> I imagine his civic attitude by analogy with the quasi-neutral stance of Solon… Solon saw himself as a mediating force, opposing the excesses of the rival parties, 'standing like a boundary mark between the warring factions' (fr.25) in order to preserve the common interests of the city as a whole.[451]

To which I would add, the turbulent international situation also informed Heraclitus to reject policies that overtly appeased the Persians or adopted their customs. Kahn himself as much says this when he claims that the Heraclitean defense of *nomos* is a reaction against cultural relativism. Hence, Kahn is on firmer ground comparing Heraclitus to Solon than elsewhere where he blithely asserts that Heraclitus is a "conservative"[452] or that he disliked democracy.[453]

Conclusion

We have seen that Heraclitus was deeply influenced by the development of the Greek understanding of law and justice during the archaic period and the early classical period. His views track the development of *nomos* from the broad notion of custom, to the narrow notion of "law." In addition, he was influenced both by the turbulence of Greek legal practice, with its endless reciprocal lawsuits, and the constitutional and international changes that occurred during his lifetime. We have seen that Heraclitus carefully applies his principle that the "*logos* is *xynos* (common)" to politics/ethics. If the *logos* is what is common, then it follows that we should behave in a way that benefits the common. But since the political embodiment of what is common, *nomos*, is fragile, it must be fought for against external and internal threats. Apart from the physical defense of the *polis*, this protection is rendered through a special kind of strife (*eris*) called justice (*dike*). Justice requires the active discouragement and punishment of behavior damaging to the common good of the *polis*.

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[451] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, 3.

[452] Kahn, 179.

[453] Kahn, 3.

Finally, we examined the evidence concerning Heraclitus' ideological allegiance. We saw that he has much more in common with ancient democrats than most scholars give him credit for. However, this was not enough to make him a committed democrat. He lived in a time when democratic ideology was still developing its own ideas and language, and thus he lacks any mention of key democratic concepts like *isonomia*, *isegoria*, *autonomia*, or *elelutheria*. Without his views on these concepts, we cannot say clearly that he was on one side or the other of the oligarch/democrat divide that would characterize political debate during the classical period (ca. 510 – 323 B.C.E.).

In short, we have seen there is a great deal more to found of political/ethical interest in Heraclitus' fragments then he is usually given credit for. By focusing on contextualizing his fragments to his historical period and biography we have been able to draw out a Heraclitus with broader interests and ideas. But what does this all mean? What, in short was this non-metaphysical part of Heraclitus' project? Even further, if Heraclitus was so interested in the value theory side of philosophy where is the evidence that the ancient philosophers that read him knew about it? In the previous chapters I have begun to answer these questions. Interpretations of his fragments have provided the pieces of Heraclitus political/ethical project. In chapter 3, I provided evidence that Plato's own ethical ideas about love were influenced by a cultural resource I have argued is common to both Plato and Heraclitus: the Eleusinian Mysteries. In the next chapter I shall put the pieces of my interpretation together and try to provide more evidence of Heraclitus' political/ethical influence on later ancient thinkers.

CHAPTER 5: HERACLITUS' ETHICAL/POLITICAL PROJECT AND ITS ANCIENT INFLUENCE

In the previous chapters, I examined the way in which applying some historical and biographical context to Heraclitus' famously obscure fragments reveals that he was interested in more than metaphysics or cosmological speculation. This claim might seem problematic because the received wisdom is that later philosophers focused on his metaphysical claims and not on any ethical or political ideas. Despite this, the evidence shows that his ethical ideas clearly had an impact on later thinkers, and that the impact of his metaphysical ideas was more complicated than conventional wisdom suggests. In part, the received view of Heraclitus as not interested in ethics is due to the Peripatetic tradition's role in the doxographical tradition. The lens of this school has served to focus our attention on areas of Peripatetic concern in the ideas of all the Pre-Socratics. As A.A. Long puts it:

> As is well-known, [the Peripatetic tradition] interpreted early Greek philosophy according to its own anachronistic preconceptions—identification of material cause(s), postulation of ἀρχαί and "elements," monism versus pluralism, etc. But still more distorting than the imposition of these categories were three doxographical points that are generally overlooked in modern scholarship: first, the Peripatetics' lack of exegetical interest in early Greek philosophers' statements about the divine; second, their presumption that the early philosophers assimilated thinking/mind to αἴσθησις … third, their assumption (somewhat analogous to the method. of Descartes and Bacon) that what the early Greek philosopher took themselves to be doing was observing and describing a physical world external to themselves, a world which did not include the observer in the materials studied.[454]

In this essay, I have endeavored to correct for the Peripatetic presumptions that we have inherited by reinjecting history into our understanding of Heraclitus.

In Chapter 3 we saw the influence exerted by the Eleusinian and Delphian religious traditions on his ideas and his style. In Chapter 4 we saw how Heraclitus extended the ideas inspired by those religious traditions to political and ethical issues that were pressing during and after his

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[454] A. A. Long, "Parmenides on Thinking Being," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 128.

time: *nomos* (law/custom), *hubris* (violence/overstepping bounds), *stasis* (civil war), and *dike* (justice). In this chapter, I will reinforce my interpretation of Heraclitus as an ethical and political thinker by drawing attention to his influence on the ethical and political ideas of his successors.[455] In brief, I believe that a close examination of the textual evidence reveals the impact of Heraclitus' ethical and political ideas on thinkers from the pre-Socratic Democritus of Abdera, to Plato and Aristotle, all the way down to the Stoics.

I. Heraclitus' Ethical/Political Views: A Summary

But before I dive into the Heraclitean influence on other thinkers, we should take a brief detour. Although I have been discussing Heraclitus' political and ethical views throughout this essay, I have not yet set all of them down in one place. I will attempt to do that here, so that we can more fully appreciate the breadth of his thinking. But first a gentle historical reminder. In Heraclitus' day there was no recognized separation between politics, ethics, and religion. Answering the questions: "How should I live?" and "What should I do?" inevitably involved a Greek's relationship to the two most important influences on a Greek's personal happiness: his *polis* and the gods. If his *polis* was chaotic, his life was chaotic. There was and is a deep connection between the political and the personal aspects of life.

It may be slightly harder for us to understand the connection the ancient Greeks made between the theological and the political. A Greek's relationship to his gods was as important to his maintenance of a good life as a well-ordered city. First, there could really be no well-ordered city in the Greek mind unless the gods ensured it. The gods were personifications of the forces of nature and other human abstractions so if a community displeased them, life in that community would become miserable. Keeping the gods "one your side" was a vital part of ancient politics. One need only consider the seriousness of the charges leveled against the problematic Alcibiades that he

[455] Section II of this chapter.

profaned the Mysteries and (possibly) defaced the city's Herms or the allegation that Socrates introduced gods not recognized by the *polis* to his youthful followers. Second, the ancient Greeks consider the gods as potential allies in achieving personal or political goals. If you wanted to seek revenge on an enemy, you would ask the help of the gods; if you wanted to make a binding oath, your promises were enforced by the gods; if you wanted a successful military campaign, you had to ask the gods about your chances of success, etc. As an ancient Greek, the gods inextricably intertwined with nearly every aspect of your everyday life.

With this reminder out of the way, we can now consider Heraclitus' own views in context. Based on my arguments of the previous chapters, we can discern three main lessons at the heart of Heraclitus' philosophy. The first lesson is that many apparently opposed things are connected; thus to understand them we must see what is "common" between them. If we apply this idea to politics, it helps explains some of Heraclitus' stranger fragments. Consider again DK53: **War is the father of all and the king of all, and has revealed that the ones are gods and the others humans, and has made the ones slaves and the others free** and DK80: **One must know that war is common, that justice is strife, and that all things come about by strife and constraint**. War appears to be the opposite of community and social structures, but it is really the source of those structures. The *polis* as a community is defined by its literal and figurative wars with other *poleis*. The gods became gods because of their war with the Titans, overthrowing the latter in the world order (*kosmos*). The vanquished in war become slaves, and the victors remain free. As discussed in Chapter 4, literal war generated a substantial portion of ancient Greek social and political structure. Heraclitus' point is not to glorify war, but to recognize how it is a force in Greek life which structured that life. In other words, he is saying that one might think that war and community/society are mere opposites, but they are in fact connected (i.e. "in common").

DK80 makes a similar point on a less grand scale. The Greek legal system, as discussed in Chapter 4, was conflictual. DK80 is in part, a recognition of this. But it is also a recognition that conflict internal to the *polis* helps generate the laws that define and protect the *polis*. Elites overstep to get more power or property. This brings about internal conflict between elites or between elites and the *demos*. Legal judgments or new laws (i.e. Solon) hold future elites back from doing the same. Strife brings about constraint just as (DK11) **Every beast is driven to pasture by blows**.[456]

Heraclitus' second lesson is that understanding what is "common" cannot be achieved through the mere accumulation of facts or opinions. Wisdom is not just reading a lot of people's books and hearing a lot of opinions so that you can create a kind of amalgam. This is what Heraclitus disliked about polymaths like Pythagoras. Polymaths, according to Heraclitus, think that because they have read many books or heard many things that most have not, that they are wiser than everyone else. But this conclusion assumes that wisdom is private and not common.[457] Polymaths are thus part of that group derided in DK2: **But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*)**, most people live as though they had their own thought** (*phronêsis*). Polymaths falsely assume they have a monopoly on wisdom when in reality (DK113) [t]**hinking** (*phroneein*) **is in common for all.** Applied to politics, this idea translates into a suspicion of some traditional indices

[456] This idea is like Machiavelli's ideas about institutionalized class conflict in the *Discourses*, Book I, Chapter 4. In that Chapter Machiavelli is discussing the conflict between the plebeians and patricians in the early history of the Roman Republic. Commentators who preceded Machiavelli derided these "disturbances" as something that should be prevented in the ideal city-state. Machiavelli, however says that "those who condemn the disturbances between the nobles and the plebeians condemn those very things that were the primary cause of Roman liberty." Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Reissue edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29. According to Machiavelli, "all of the laws passed in favour of liberty" were born from the conflict between the upper class and the people. He even goes so far as to say that historical examples of exceptional ability that came from this period of strife are directly attributable to that strife "for good examples come from good training, good training from good laws, and good laws from those disturbances that many people thoughtlessly condemn." Machiavelli, 39. A good republic must have some way for "the people to express their ambitions, especially those cities that intend to make use of the people in important affairs." Machiavelli, 30. If that is not present, then a city becomes truly unstable. In Heraclitean terms, the unity of opposites can be found, not only in the cosmos, but also within good government.

[457] Since only a very few (wealthy world travelers perhaps?) could ever achieve this sort of wisdom, it is much like owning a lot of private property.

of political power such as privilege, birth, wealth etc. Simply put, Heraclitus does not think members of higher economic strata, like himself, have a monopoly on what is beneficial for the *polis*. Thus we have statements like DK125a: **May your wealth never abandon you**, he said, **men of Ephesus, so that your wickedness can be proven.** Instead, Heraclitus believed that, regardless of background, any and all citizens had a shared responsibility to ensure the common good. Whether they be the *demos* fighting to protect the law (DK44) or a single person who is particularly beneficial to the *polis* (DK33,49). This explains the sentiment, although not the historical context, behind DK121, the fragment about Hermodorus' exile. What matters is the common good, regardless of the source. The Ephesians, in rejecting Hermodorus (who promoted the common good) are less competent than literal legal incompetents ("beardless boys") since they would reject help for the city for petty reasons.[458]

In his essay, "Shared Responsibility for the Common Good: Heraclitus, Early Philosophy, and Political Thought," historian Kurt A. Raaflaub approximates what I am calling Lesson (2) by examining, inter alia, fragment DK44, DK113, and DK116: **All humans have a share in knowing themselves and in thinking with moderation** (*sophronein*) [sometimes translated as "sound thinking"]. Raaflaub writes:

> We can now expand this: not only wall and law, but also sound thinking and speaking are decisive to protect the common good. And as all citizens must engage in protecting wall and law, so they all must commit themselves to, and are capable of, sound thinking and speaking, Hence, whatever Heraclitus thought about the demos's capacity to *participate in government*, ultimately his scorn was directed against all, whether high or low, who were too stupid to recognize their capacity and obligation to *participate in the quest for the common good*. His insistence that *soundness and safety lie in what is public and common* and that *all must contribute to it*

[458] This Lesson also has its parallel in Machiavelli's *Discourses*, Book I, Chapter 4. In response to the potential objection that the people that he has so much faith in could be in error about the common good, Machiavelli responds that the remedy is in "public assemblies where some worthy man may arise and, making a speech, demonstrate to the people that they are mistaken." Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 30. This trust in the "worthy" (perhaps men like Solon) to direct the people in times where they err is analogous to Heraclitus' statements that (DK47) **Let us not agree in a haphazard way about the most important things**, (DK33) **It is also a law to obey the plan of just one man**, and (DK49) **One man, for me, is ten thousand, if he is the best.** If the *demos* or the elites are wrong about the common good, through "haphazard" agreement, then it is the responsibility of any individual who sees this to set them aright.

> seems to me a crucial and so far not sufficiently appreciated component of Heraclitus's political thinking.[459]

As we have seen above, Raaflaub is on the right track here. This egalitarian strain in Heraclitus usually goes unnoticed,[460] but it is unsurprising since, as I have argued, the very egalitarian Eleusinian Mysteries deeply impacted Heraclitus. Just as initiation into Demeter's Mysteries was open to (almost) everyone, so too are the attainment of truth and the common good.

The third lesson on follows from the first two. This lesson holds that "wisdom must be achieved through shared (i.e. common) experience and active participation in seeking it." The best illustration of this is the anecdote discussed in Chapter 3. Recall that in his *Moralia* Plutarch told the following story about Heraclitus:

> And is not the god [Apollo] himself fond of conciseness and brevity in his oracles, and is he not called Loxias because he avoids prolixity rather than obscurity? And are not those who indicate by signs, without a word, what must be done, praised and admired exceedingly? So Heracleitus, when his fellow-citizens asked him to propose some opinion about concord [*homonoia*], mounted the platform, took a cup of cold water, sprinkled it with barley-meal, stirred it with penny-royal, drank it up, and departed …[461]

Foley is surely correct that the meaning of this anecdote is that concord comes from the intermixing of citizens to reveal something common in a manner analogous to the "mixing" of people from all levels of society during the Mysteries.[462] The source of this anecdote is most likely DK125: **A kukeon too separates out if it is not stirred.** The *polis*, like the *kukeon*, is a mixture that separates into different opposing elements if it is not "stirred;" if its citizens do not actively participate together in protecting and promoting the common good. For example, citizens must protect the law

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[459] Raaflaub, "Shared Responsibility for the Common Good: Heraclitus, Early Philosophy, and Political Thought," 122–23.

[460] Other than Raaflaub the only other writer I can think of who has noticed this is Herbert Granger who writes at the end of his essay "Heraclitus' Quarrel with Polymathy and *Historie*" that "[t]he elitist Heraclitus is an egalitarian when it comes to the estimation of the underlying capacity humans possess for the attainment of the truth." Granger, "Heraclitus' Quarrel with Polymathy and Historie," 259.

[461] Plutarch, *Plutarch*, 1939, 447 (Moralia, 511c).

[462] Foley, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 47.

because it is common to all (DK44: **The people must fight for their law just as for their city wall**; DK114). More specifically, they must guard against *hubris*, the offense that divides communities (DK43: **One must extinguish arrogant violence** (*hubris*) **more than a conflagration**).

Since *hubris* is a crime of immoderation, it follows that the citizens should strive to be moderate (DK112: **To be moderate: the greatest virtue**). Humans may want more than is good for them or their fellow citizens, so (DK110) **For humans, that whatever they wish happens is not better**.[463] Heraclitus acknowledges that moderation can be difficult since passion is powerful (DK85: **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard: for whatever it wants, it purchases it at the price of the soul** [i.e. of life]).[464]

All this contributes to one of Heraclitus most quotable ideas, the thought that (DK119) **Character, for a human, is his personal deity** [*daimon*]**.** A citizen's habits or disposition and not their wealth or status determine their fate. If we consider the citizen and their *polis* in parallel, we see that Heraclitus considers character to be something like the *nomos* of an individual. Recall that in DK114[465] he wrote that *nomos* is guarded over by the divine. It might not be too much to say that *Nomos*, for a *polis*, is its personal deity. Citizens must, must actively pursue the common good together both for the good of the *polis* and for their own personal good.

As we have seen through this summary, there is much greater political and ethical depth to Heraclitus than has previously been recognized. While it might lack the sophistication of modern

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[463] This moderation extends to personal behavior, like excessive consumption of alcohol. When a person drinks, he is not in control of himself due to his "wet" soul (DK117: **When a man has become drunk, he is led stumbling by a slave, a mere boy: he does not know where he is going, his soul is wet**). Accordingly, good citizen strives to not be impaired by alcohol; to have a "dry" soul (DK118: **A dry soul: wisest and best**).

[464] I have modified the translation from Laks-Most to remove the "an."

[465] Those who speak with their mind (*xun noôi*) must rely (*iskhurizesthai*) on what is common (*xunôi*) for all, just as a city does on its law, and much more strongly (*iskhurterôs*). For all human laws are nourished by one law, the divine one: for it dominates as much as it wants to, and it suffices for all, and there is some left over.

ethical theories, Heraclitus' fragments show a real effort to combine traditional moral (i.e. Delphic) ideas about moderation with political ideas about the stability of the body politic. Indeed, we can see clear echoes of these ideas in the thinking of Democritus at one chronological extreme and the Stoics on another. In what follows I will examine these echoes to show that Heraclitus' ethical views did not go totally unnoticed by later thinkers, despite the emphasis that his metaphysical views often get.

II. The Impact of Heraclitus' Ethical Ideas on Later Thinkers

A. Democritus

Democritus of Abdera (or maybe Miletos) lived from c. 460 B.C.E. to c.370 B.C.E. He and his teacher Leucippus are the founding figures of the philosophical school called "Atomism." Atomists speculated that all matter was composed of tiny indivisible particles arranged in the "void." Among the numerous fragments attributed to Democritus are a considerable number concerned with ethics.[466] He is the earliest philosopher to explicitly suggest a "supreme good or goal, which he calls 'cheerfulness' or 'well-being,' and which he appears to have identified with the untroubled enjoyment of life."[467] Indeed, some believe that prior to Democritus there was no clearly articulated philosophical ethics. Speaking in favor of this view, Charles Kahn acknowledges that both the fragments of Democritus *and* Heraclitus are our earliest records of moral philosophy[468], but claims that the latter are too "brief, enigmatic, and chronologically remote."[469] This last point is an exaggeration, however. While the brevity of the fragments is ineradicable, we can render them much

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[466] Sylvia Berryman, "Democritus," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/democritus/.

[467] C. C. W. Taylor, trans., *The Atomists: Leucippus and Democritus: Fragments*, Reprint edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division, 2010), 227.

[468] Unlike Naddaf, Kahn sees Anaximander as only interested in cosmology and natural philosophy. However, it could be argued following Naddaf that Anaximander was an earlier moral philosopher due to his political ideas.

[469] Charles H. Kahn, "Democritus and the Origins of Moral Psychology," *The American Journal of Philology* 106, no. 1 (1985): 1, https://doi.org/10.2307/295049.

less enigmatic if we situate them in their time and place. In fact, Kahn himself points to several instances where Heraclitus clearly influenced Democritus.[470] Here are a few of the more obvious ones:

Heraclitus[471]	**Democritus**[472]
DK6. ὁ ἥλιος ... καθάπερ ὁ Ἡράκλειτός φησι, νέος ἐφ' ἡμέρῃ ἐστίν **The sun** […] **is new every day.**	B158 ὡς φησι Δημόκριτος νέα ἐφ ἡμέῃ φρονέοντες […] a**s Democritus says, humans, "thinking new thoughts every day"** [...]
DK119. ἔφη ὡς ἦθος ἀνθρώπῳ δαίμων **Character, for a human, is his personal deity** [*daimôn*].	B171. εὐδαιμονίη οὐκ ἐν βοσκήμασιν οἰκεῖ, οὐδὲ χρευσῷ. ψυχὴ οἰκητήριον δαίμονος. **Happiness** (*eudaimoniê*) d**oes not reside in flocks nor in gold: the soul is the residence of a divinity** (*daimôn*).
DK85. θυμῷ μάχεσθαι χαλεπόν· ὃ γὰρ ἂν θέλῃ, ψυχῆς ὠνεῖται **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard: for whatever it wants, it purchases it at the price of the soul** [i.e. of life].	B236. θυμῷ μάχεσθαι μέν χαλεπόν ἀνδρὸς δέ τὸ κρατέειν **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard; but it is the mark of a rational man to dominate over it.**
DK25. μόροι γὰρ μέζονες μέζονας μοίρας λαγχάνουσι **Greater deaths** (*moroi*) **obtain greater portions** (*moirai*).	B219. χρεμάτων ὄρεξις ἢν μὴ ὁρίζεται κόρῳ, πωνίης ἐσχάτης πολλὸν χαλεπωτέρη μέζονες γὰρ ὀρέξεις μεζονας ἐνδείας ποιεῦσιν **The desire for wealth, if it is not limited by satisfaction, is much harder to endure than extreme poverty. For greater appetites create greater needs.**
DK13 Pigs take greater pleasure in mire than in pure water.	B147 Pigs […] **go mad for rubbish,** according to Democritus. [473]

[470] An important note on formatting. Laks-Most use **boldface type** to indicate that the fragment is a quote instead of a paraphrase. Where there is some doubt as to the attribution of the quote they use *italics* to indicate it. Unless otherwise specified, I am merely following this convention herein. For example, although most scholars include the numerous fragments that Stobaeus attributes to "Democrates" to Democritus, L-M wish to indicate the debate over these fragments through italics. Although I am following their convention, I side with those that attribute these fragments to Democritus. Even if this were not so, little in my argument hangs on this attribution. The intention of this section is to show that Heraclitus had an influence on the ethical-political thinking of later thinkers. It doesn't matter greatly if this thinker is called Democritus or "Democrate." All that matters is someone was inspired to rework his ideas as their own philosophy.

[471] All Heraclitus quotations herein are from: Xenophanes and Heraclitus, *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume III*.

[472] All Democritus quotations herein are from: André Laks and Glenn W. Most, trans., *Early Greek Philosophy, Volume VII: Later Ionian and Athenian Thinkers, Part 2* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[473] This parallel is my addition. I think Kahn missed this one.

As we can see from these comparisons, Democritus took Heraclitus' work as raw material that he could draw on and adapt in various ways. B158 and DK6, for example, are cases in which Democritus offers an interpretation of Heraclitus. Democritus takes the enigmatic **The sun** […] **is new every day** metaphorically to refer to the changing nature of human thought. Democritus reworks and rephrases the pithy DK119 - **Character, for a human, is his personal deity** [*daimôn*] into the "spelled out" B171: "Happiness (*eudaimoniê*) does not reside in flocks nor in gold: the soul is the residence of a divinity (*daimôn*)." Other places, Democritus seems to be trying to "complete a thought" begun by a Heraclitan fragment. In DK85 Heraclitus writes (in DK85) that **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard: for whatever it wants, it purchases it at the price of the soul** [i.e. of life]. This fragment is brimming with interesting insights into Heraclitus' approach to both psychology and ethics. It conveys the difficulty of fighting against a strong passion, anger for example, as trying to stop something that consumes your life force. By noting the danger of this *thumos*, Heraclitus is recommending that we fight against it, despite the difficulty. Democritus correctly sees this but wants to "complete the thought" so-to-speak. Thus we get B236: "To fight against ardor (*thumos*) is hard; but it is the mark of a rational man to dominate over it" which makes things more explicit. In short, Democritus is drawing out the clear implication that although it is hard, it is not *impossible*. Finally, for B219 Democritus borrows the structure of a Heraclitean fragment in its last sentence. Democritus declares that "The desire for wealth, if it is not limited by satisfaction, is much harder to endure than extreme poverty. <u>For greater appetites create greater needs</u> (emphasis added)" whereas Heraclitus in DK25 writes that **Greater deaths** (*moroi*) **obtain greater portions** (*moirai*). As we saw in Chapter 2, DK25 probably relates to the kind of immortality one gets through their reputation after death and not to the satisfaction of desires. Democritus most likely only cares about the pithiness of DK25 and thus borrows its structure but not its meaning.

Democritus, however, not only makes clear his points of agreement with Heraclitus, he is also moved to make clear his disagreements with the Ephesian. These disagreements appear to be roughly epistemological. In fragment B11, Democritus appears to be directly opposing Heraclitus's views about the senses. Whereas Heraclitus seems to indicate some sense experience can be trustworthy (DK55: **All the things of which sight and hearing are knowledge** (*mathesis*) **I honor most.**), Democritus, as an atomist, calls them "obscure": B11 - **There are two forms of knowledge** (*gnômê*)**, the one genuine, and the other obscure** [*skotie*]**. And to the obscure one belong all of these: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. The other is genuine, and is separated from this one.** Calling these forms of knowledge "obscure" (*skotie*) might even be a jab at Heraclitus nickname *Skoteinos* (the "Obscure").

Despite this difference of opinion over the senses, we saw above that Democtrius several times seems to paraphrase or rework Heraclitus' ethical ideas as his own. This, however, is not the extent of the impact of Heraclitus' ethical ideas on Democritus. Democritus seems to espouse a Heraclitean view that things typically considered "bad" can be positive, if looked at in the right light. Accordingly, he claims in B229 that *Thrift and hunger are useful; but in the right circumstances so too is expense. To discern this is the mark of a good man.* The first part of this fragment seems to recall Heraclitus' saying in DK11 that **Illness makes health sweet and good, hunger does so for satiety, toil for repose.** We can only appreciate the positives of "health," "satiety" and "repose" because we know their opposites. Heraclitus is content to leave this lesson as is, but Democritus wants to make it clear that these "bad" things are only useful, much like their opposites "in the right circumstances." It is the "mark of a good man" to know these circumstances; To know when we should not accept hunger, or thrift despite or natural desires to the contrary. Indeed, this is much like what Heraclitus is saying in DK110: **For humans, that whatever they wish happens is not**

better. Here again as with B236/DK85 both philosophers are cautioning against surrendering oneself to one's passions. Even when the passions are understandable like the desire to sate hunger.

By far the most interesting overlap between Democritus and Heraclitus on ethical matters concerns their views on politics. Democritus was keen to recommend conventional morality. Unfortunately, as with anyone who thinks that conventions have moral force, he is bedeviled by the possible counterexample of "someone who can escape conventional sanctions, e.g., by doing wrong in secret."[474] One way to counteract this criticism is to rely on the threat of divine sanction. If you violate norms, the gods will punish you. This is *part* of Heraclitus' response we can see in fragments like DK28B: **Justice will seize hold of those who fabricate lies and of those who bear witness to them** and` DK94: **The sun will not overstep measures, otherwise, the Erinyes, Justice's helpers, will find it out.** It is unclear what Democritus thought on this matter as two of his fragments appear to be at cross-purposes here.[475] D81 says that "They alone are loved by the gods, to whom wrongdoing is hateful"[476] suggesting some divine benefits for ethical behavior (at least in *this* life). However, D40 suggests that the gods do not bad, harmful and useless things on humans, rather humans "run into them themselves through blindness and lack of judgment."[477]

It is clearer, however, that Democritus seems to have rejected the antithesis that gives rise to the problem in the first place; the distinction between *nomos* and *phusis*. This opposition between the conventional/legal (*nomos*) and the natural (*phusis*) is the underlying assumption behind objections like the ring of Gyges example from *Republic* 2, and in the work of other sophistic philosophers. What basis, if any, do customs and laws have in reality? Are they merely fictions created by humans?

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[474] Taylor, *The Atomists*, 227. The most famous example of a challenge to conventional morality is in Republic II where Glaucon tells the tale of the ring of Gyges. Aristophanes and Antiphon addressed the same issue earlier, but the ring of Gyges example is the most famous.

[475] Taylor, 228–29.

[476] Taylor, 31.

[477] Taylor, 19. A notion which seems very Heraclitean in inspiration, see DK119.

If so, what moral authority do they have?[478] However, their views seem to rely on the presumption that our individual self-interest, which is part of our nature (*phusis*), not only *contrasts* with but is *opposed* by conventions like laws and conventional morality.

Democritus has his own take on this argument. He writes in B112 that "It is the aim of law to benefit the life of men; and it can, provided they wish to benefit from it. For it displays its goodness to those who obey."[479] This fragment is an outright rejection of the assumption of our Sophists above that the law is actually opposed to our personal benefit. The last sentence even implies a reason Glaucon, et. al. are mistaken. The law only benefits people that follow it. If you fail to follow it, you reap none of the benefits. Our Sophists do not like the law for the same reason that criminals do not like the law. Democritus would say that their error is assuming that their private "benefit" can even exist outside the protection of the law which sustains the *polis*. He writes in B252 that *One should consider the affairs of the city to be the most important of all, so that it will be well-directed, neither being contentious against what is equitable nor attributing to oneself a power contrary to what is useful for the whole. For a well-directed city is the greatest rectification, and it contains everything; and as long as it is safe, everything is safe, and if it is destroyed, everything is destroyed.* If so-called "private benefit" comes at the expense of the common good, it undermines the very foundations by which *any* individual good can be enjoyed: the safety and stability of the city itself.

As Taylor[480] points out, the central idea of B252 bears some resemblance to the point that Protagoras' myth makes in the Platonic dialogue that bears his name.[481] In it he describes early humans as disparate and at the mercy of other animals because of their natural weakness. But

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[478] Callicles expressed the most extreme anti-*nomos* position in this debate in Plato's *Gorgias*. In that work he argues that "conventional morality is a contrivance devised by the weak and unintelligent to inhibit the strong and intelligent from doing what they are entitled by nature to do, viz. exploit their inferiors for their own advantage."[478] We can see various versions of this views in the ideas of Antiphon, Thrasymachus, and the aforementioned Glaucon as well.

[479] Taylor, *The Atomists*, 39.

[480] Taylor, 229.

[481] Plato, *Protagoras*, trans. Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell (Hackett Publishing, 1992), 17–18, (Protagoras 322a-323a).

because they did not possess the "art of politics" they were unable to fight off the animals. Even when they tried to band together in cities for mutual protection, they were unable to sustain themselves because, without politics, they fell to fighting one another. Fearful that mankind would soon perish, "he sent Hermes to bring justice and a sense of shame to humans, so that there would be order within cities and bonds of friendship to unite them."[482] When Hermes asked if these new arts of justice and shame should be distributed to a few like the art of medicine, Zeus commanded that they be given to all because "cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these, as is the case with the other arts. [483] While not arguing the exact same thing, Protagoras and Democritus' arguments have some connections. Protagoras is effectively identifying "justice and shame" as the psychological antecedents of law and justice in the city. Democritus, on the other hand, focuses on qualities of cities themselves "law" and "proper direction." In both cases, the core of the argument is that we could not enjoy anything good[484] if we, like Glaucon, were to consider the law our enemy.

Another way of putting the same point is that there must be something that binds us together in a community, something which we all agree upon, for us to make any meaningful accomplishments. Thus we find in B250 Democritus' writes that *It is from consensus* [homonoies] *that great deeds and, for cities, wars can be brought to a successful conclusion, otherwise not.* This fragment recalls the anecdote about Heraclitus discussed in Chapter 3. Plutarch recounts that "Heracleitus, when his fellow-citizens asked him to propose some opinion about concord [*homonoia*], mounted the platform, took a cup of cold water, sprinkled it with barley-meal, stirred it with penny-royal, drank it up, and departed …[485] As I argued, the best way to understand this anecdote is that consensus or concord is only achieved, when like the disparate ingredients of the *kukeon* or the different initiates at Eleusis,

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[482] Plato, 17, (Protagoras 322b-c).

[483] Plato, 18, (Protagoras 322d).

[484] Where "anything good" is presumed to be a benefit of living in a *polis*.

[485] Plutarch, *Plutarch*, 1939, 447 (Moralia, 511c).

we mix together to form something common. If we agree with Glaucon we must assume that getting whatever we might wish is in our best interests. As we have seen, Democritus argues that this assumption is mistaken. Without some consensus, we cannot pursue our interests at all. Or as Heraclitus puts it in DK110: **For humans, that whatever they wish happens is not better.**

Democritus' ideas about the importance of law and the well-directed city in B250 and B252 clearly echo central ideas in Heraclitus. For example, DK44: **The people must fight for their law just as for their city wall** and DK43: **One must extinguish arrogant violence** (*hubris*) **more than a conflagration.** As I have repeatedly argued, just as the city wall provides the benefit of protection to all citizens, so too does the law. The law is a promoter of our most basic need for protection from external and internal threats and not opposed to our interests. Here again it is only the enemies of the common good that see the law as against their personal benefit. Whether these enemies are an invading army or citizens that generate the conditions of civil war. Democritus and Heraclitus also share the view that it is proper to follow the dictates of wiser authorities than oneself. Democritus claims that (B247) *To submit to law; to a magistrate, and to a wiser man is orderly* (*kosmonion*). Heraclitus similarly declares that (DK33) **It is also a law to obey the plan of just one man** and (DK49) **One man, for me, is ten thousand, if he is the best.**

As we can see, there is a clear parallel between the styles of the two thinkers. Kahn argues "that the Heraclitean echoes in Democritus are no mere ornament of style but involve profound rethinking of Heraclitean ideas."[486] Yet this conclusion is at odds with the idea that Heraclitus' own fragments are comparatively too enigmatic or remote to give us a clear picture of his ethical thought. It is not possible to determine that Democritus *re*-thought Heraclitus if we cannot discern what Heraclitus thought. Kahn's conclusion about Democritus is correct, while his dismissal of the Heraclitean fragments is not. Remote and enigmatic as Heraclitus may be, Democritus seems to

[486] Kahn, "Democritus and the Origins of Moral Psychology," 11.

think that the Ephesian was clear enough to engage with his ideas. Accordingly, we have established one thinker who was influenced by Heraclitus' ethical/political ideas.

B. Plato

1. The Use of Heraclitus in Dialogues About Value

There is little doubt that Plato was concerned with ethical and political ideas. In addition, we have already seen in Chapter 3 that one of the works concerned with an ethical matter (i.e. love), Plato's *Symposium,* was influenced in part by Heraclitus' ideas. Excluding the reference in *Symposium*, Plato makes mention of Heraclitus overtly at least eight times in the dialogues. (Greater Hippias 289a-b*, Cratylus* 401d, 402a, 411b; *Theaetetus* 152e, 160d, 177c; and *Philebus* 43a). The most interesting of these, for the sake of this essay, is the controversial [487] *Greater Hippias*,[488] where Socrates asks the self-proclaimed expert Hippias to teach him what the beautiful is. His first answer is "*parthenos kale kalon,"* "a beautiful maiden is beautiful."[489] Socrates then proceeds to apply this formula "a beautiful *x* is beautiful" to mares and lyres with Hippias' agreement. When he applies it to pottery, however, Hippias objects. Hippias reasons as follows: "This utensil, when well wrought, is beautiful, but absolutely considered it does not deserve to be regarded as beautiful in comparison with a mare and a maiden and all beautiful things."[490] Socrates suggest that the best response to someone who thinks a "beautiful pot is beautiful" is to cite the fragment of Heraclitus where he writes that (DK82) **The most beautiful monkey is ugly compared with the human race.** Hippias agrees, but Socrates has another fragment of Heraclitus as a response to the use of the first: (DK83) **The wisest human being will seem to be a monkey compared to a god in wisdom, beauty, and everything else.**

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[487] Granted, there is some dispute about the authenticity of *Greater Hippias*, but this does not blunt the point. Assuming, *arguendo*, that *Greater Hippias* was not written by Plato but by a student or imitator, this imitator clearly thought that there was material of interest to discussions of value in Heraclitus and not only metaphysical or physical speculations.

[488] Plato, *Cratylus. Parmenides. Greater Hippias. Lesser Hippias.*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), 355 (Greater Hippias, 286c-d).

[489] Plato, 361 (Greater Hippias, 287e).

[490] Plato, 365 (Greater Hippias, 288e).

Since everything pales in comparison to the gods, even Hippias' beautiful maiden will suffer by the comparison.[491]Since the question was what the "absolute beautiful is" then Hippias' first answer is lacking.

We can see here another use of Heraclitus by Plato to discuss questions of value. Much like the previous example from *Symposium*, Plato's use of Heraclitus is as a stepping stone to his own theories.[492] Heraclitus' ideas show what is inadequate about Hippias' definition of the beautiful, but they do not provide a definition of it themselves.[493]

2. Heraclitean Themes in *Republic*, Book V

We can also discern Heraclitean influence in *Republic* Book V.[494] Chief among these is a theme that carries over from Hippias Major[495] how things can apparently be both beautiful and ugly

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[491] Plato, 365 (Greater Hippias, 289a-b).

[492] In the other dialogues, Plato makes several references to what he takes to be Heraclitus' core doctrine that "everything changes," but he doesn't mention how this doctrine fits in with Heraclitus' other ideas. These references cannot tell us if Plato believed that Heraclitus' sole interest was in metaphysics/physics or if he had ideas about other areas of human wisdom. For example, it is impossible to disentangle the "Heraclitean" teachings of Cratylus from those *ascribed to Heraclitus* in the dialogue the bears the former's name.[492] None of the extant Heraclitean fragments suggest anything like the philosophy of language proposed by the character of Cratylus (i.e. that the names for things have divine origins). Indeed, later in the dialogue Socrates reveals plainly that his primary aim is to ridicule extreme views about the nature of language by making a joke:

By the dog, I believe I have a fine intuition which has just come to me, that the very ancient men who invented names were quite like most of the present philosophers who always get dizzy as they turn round and round in their search for the nature of things, and then the things seem to them to turn round and round and be in motion. They think the cause of this belief is not an affection within themselves, but that the nature of things really is such that nothing is at rest or stable, but everything is flowing and moving and always full of constant motion and generation. I say this because I thought of it with reference to all these words we are now considering. (Cratylus 411b-c).

In other words, since thinkers change their views on language so often, they attribute their intellectual dizziness to a constantly changing world. They take their private views of the world to be world itself. Ironically, Heraclitus would agree with Socrates as we can plainly see from DK2: "**But although the account** (*logos*) **is in common** (*xunos*), **most people live as though they had their own thought** (*phronêsis*)." Cratylus may *claim* to be a Heraclitean but his ideas do not mesh well with the Ephesian's words

[493] Since we do not have Heraclitus' complete work, it is difficult to ascertain if the fragments came from a section of the book on beauty. Indeed, it is difficult to tell if they even came from the same section of the book at all. On the assumption that they do come from the same section I think it probable that they belong to the same section as DK114 which declares the guardianship of the divine over human law or in the same section as DK78: T**he human character does not possess judgments** (*gnomai*)**, but the divine one possesses them.** In either case I believe the purpose of these fragments was not to announce some specific doctrine about beauty, but to support Heraclitus' general theme of the supremacy of the divine over the mundane.

[494] One (a bit speculative) connection is the way Socrates argues for the increase participation of women in the *kallipolis*, shares certain ideas in Heraclitus. Most obviously there is Socrates argument that we should promote whatever is

at the same time. Just as in that earlier dialogue Socrates is considering how it is possible for there to be various opposite ways to consider the same things. He concludes that

> … the same account is true of the just and the unjust, the good and the bad, and all the forms. Each of them is itself one, but because they manifest themselves everywhere in association with actions, bodies, and one another, each of them appears to be many.[496]

Here Plato has Socrates employing Heraclitus' unity of opposites idea to support his own views about the difference between the sensible and the intelligible world. In the sensible world we have opposites. Recall DK82: **The most beautiful monkey is ugly compared with the human race.** In the intelligible world, however, we have unity. Thus we have an instance in Plato's main argument in the *Republic* where he uses Heraclitean ideas to support his own views about value.

There is also the inclusion of the "children's riddle" in the so-called "argument from opposites" (478e-479d). Sensible objects appear to have qualified properties. I am big compared to a mouse, but I am also small when compared to a mountain. Plato compares this to a ambiguous children's riddle that went something like this "A man who is not a man saw and did not see a bird that was not a bird in a tree (*xulon*) that was not a tree; he hit (*ballô*) and did not hit it with a stone that was not a stone."[497] The solution being "a eunuch with bad eyesight hit a bat on a rafter, threw a pumice stone at it and missed."[498] Socrates declares that trouble is that such riddles are ambiguous "and one cannot understand them as fixedly being or fixedly not being or as both or neither. This is

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beneficial to the city, regardless of conventional mores, in that city's social arrangements. Thus, for example, guardian women must share in physical training, war, and other guardian duties the same as guardian men because there is nothing "better for a city than having the best possible men and women as its citizens."[494] This recalls the ideas underlying not only DK121 concerning the foolishness of banishing the "beneficial" Hermodorus, but also DK49: **One man [*heis* lit. "one"], for me, is ten thousand, if he is the best**, DK113: **Thinking** (*phroneein*) **is in common for all**, etc. All of which suggest that cities must not squander the potential of their citizens.

[495] *Symposium* also tackles this topic.

[496] Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, 151, (476a).

[497] Plato, 155, n.32.

[498] Plato, 155, n.32.

like Heraclitus' critique of Homer for misunderstanding a children's riddle in DK56[499] discussed back in Chapter 3.

More speculatively, we can also detect the presence of Heraclitus in the latter half of Book V which introduces the idea that philosophy and political power should coincide. To make his point, Socrates must give Glaucon his definition of a true philosopher (i.e. someone fit to govern the *kalliopolis*). He starts with a contrast between someone who believes in beautiful things versus someone who believes in the beautiful itself (i.e. the philosopher).[500] The former is "living in a dream rather than a wakened state"[501] while the latter is awake. In DK1, Heraclitus claims he will analyze each thing according to its nature, but some people will not understand him. These people, though conscious are like those that are asleep (**But other men are unaware of all they do when awake, just as they forget all they do while they are asleep**). Further in DK89: "Heraclitus says that those who are awake have a world that is one and in common, but that each of those who are asleep turns aside into his own particular world." In other words, in sleep they turn away from the *logos*.

We can only call a philosopher's thought "knowledge" (*gnome*), all else is just opinion (*doxa*).[502] We can also find this distinction between knowledge and opinion – and the poor valuation of those who only have the latter – in Heraclitus. We have, for example, DK70: "Heraclitus thought that human opinions are children's toys." But more importantly we have DK17: "Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions (*dokeousi*)"[503] Accordingly, it is arguable that the metaphysical distinction

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[499] Regarding the knowledge of things that are evident, humans are fooled in the same way as Homer. Who was wiser than all the other Greeks. For boys who were killing lice fooled him by saying, 'The ones we see and grasp, we leave behind; the ones we do not see or grasp, we take away.'

[500] Plato, *Republic (Grube Edition)*, 151, (476).

[501] Plato, 151, (476c).

[502] Plato, 151, (476d).

[503] Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 1981, (K4). *Dokeo* (which means to expect, to seem, or to suppose) is the etymological source of Plato's word *doxa.*

between seeming/opinion and reality/knowledge we find in Plato[504] was already present in Heraclitus.

Accordingly, we have seen in this and previous chapters that Heraclitus' work was an influence on both Platonic ethics *and* metaphysics and not always a negative one. Plato seems to approve of some of Heraclitus' fragments, some basic ideas about the governance of the *polis*, and shares with Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Xenophon the distinction between opinion and knowledge which became a fundamental point of debate in philosophy as a subject of inquiry. This shows that we look carefully we can uncover some of Heraclitus' underplayed legacy as an early philosopher of ethics through his impact on later thinkers.

C. Aristotle

We can apply a similar analysis to Aristotle. Aristotle refers to Heraclitus no fewer than eight times. About five of these appear to be quotations. Four of *these* appear in Aristotle's works on ethics. For example, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. 8, he cites DK8 (Heraclitus [scil. says] **that what is opposed converges, and that the most beautiful harmony** (*harmonia*) **comes out of what diverges, and that all things come about by strife**) when discussing matters of opinion on the nature of friendship. He contrasts Heraclitus with Empedocles who thought that like attracted like. He then summarily dismisses both theories as "scientific speculations [] not germane to our present inquiry."[505] Note the difference between Aristotle's treatment of DK8 and Plato's treatment of a similar fragment DK51: **They do not comprehend how, diverging, it accords with itself: a backward-turning fitting-together** (*harmonia*)**, as of a bow and a lyre.** Plato takes it as having ethical import and Aristotle categorizes it as scientific speculation. This latter approach is in keeping with Aristotle's rigid systemization of previous thinkers into categories. He classifies Heraclitus as

[504] Not to forget that this distinction was also in Parmenides. According to Kahn, this distinction goes all the way back to Xenophanes claim that we could not know the truth about theological matters. Kahn, 211.

[505] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, 2nd edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1934), 455.

"scientist" and thus ignores the possibility that DK8 applied to anything other than scientific matters. In *Ethics*, Bk. 10, Aristotle makes use of Heraclitus again. This time he is lecturing on pleasure. Specifically, he is discussing the fact the distinct species of animals seem to have different pleasures. To this effect he cites DK9: **Asses would choose sweepings rather than gold**, because Aristotle explains, "to asses food gives more pleasure than gold."[506] Here again, he treats Heraclitus' statement as a sort of scientific one, useful only for the categorization of phenomena.

Interestingly, Aristotle uses the next ethical fragment in both his *Eudemian Ethics* and *Politics*.[507] In *Eudemian Ethics*, Book II, Aristotle is lecturing on what "voluntary" and "involuntary" mean. "Voluntary" he explains seems to mean "conformity with appetition, or with purposive choice, or with thought."[508] Appetition, subdivides into three categories: wish, passion, and desire. He considers desire first. Acting in accordance with desire seems voluntary because so acting is unforced (i.e. not involuntary). But a problem arises when we consider an "uncontrolled man" (i.e. weak willed). An uncontrolled man "does not do what he wishes, for being uncontrolled means acting against what one thinks to be best owing to desire."[509] Thus weirdly they seem to be acting both voluntarily and involuntarily. The same problem, argues Aristotle, reoccurs when we consider passion (*thumou*). Again, acting in conformity with passion seems to be voluntary because restraining passion requires force and is therefore involuntary. Here he gives Heraclitus credit for recognizing that restraining passion is painful and cites as proof DK85: **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard: for whatever it wants, it purchases it at the price of the soul** [i.e. of life]. Indeed, he thought this fragment was so useful he cites it again in his *Politics*. In *Politics*, Book V Aristotle is discussing the causes of regime change. Toward the end of that book he lectures on the diverse ways that

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[506] Aristotle, 605.

[507] Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics: Books I, II, and VIII*, trans. Michael Woods, 2 edition (Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press, 1992), 126.

[508] Aristotle, 267 (EE, 1223a24-25).

[509] Aristotle, 271 (EE, 1223b7-11).

monarchies and tyrannies preserve themselves against overthrow. After recommending things like moderation and zeal regarding religious observances to the tyrant, he moves onto how to that tyrant can avoid assassination. His advice is to take care not to inflict dishonor or outrage on any aristocrats under his power. As he puts it "Hence the greatest care must be taken to guard against those who think that insolent outrage [*hubrizesthai*] is being done either to themselves or to those who happen to be under their care; for men attacking under the influence of anger [*thumon*] are reckless of themselves."[510] As support he cites DK85. Here it is clearer that Aristotle is using the polysemic word *thumos* (e.g it can also mean "spirit" or "soul") to mean something like anger, more specifically, the feeling that one has suffered an affront. Thus, here finally we have a clear case of Aristotle using Heraclitus' ideas as a part of a political/ethical analysis.

We have now seen that even a source like Aristotle, whose school is the most responsible for the predominant narrative about Heraclitus that I am challenging, recognizes both metaphysical *and* ethical/political elements in Heraclitus' thought. It is true that compared to Plato and to our next subject (i.e. the Stoics) his appreciation of this aspect of the Ephesian's thought is slight. However, the fact remains that it is there and thus serves as further evidence for my claim that Heraclitus had ethical/political ideas. Now, let us turn to the final group of thinkers influenced by Heraclitus: the Stoics.

D. The Stoics

Although scholarly estimation of its extent has waxed and waned over the years, most scholars think that Heraclitus had some influence on the Stoics.[511] Most typically, they see his impact in Stoic cosmology. As A.A. Long and others argue, Stoic cosmology formed in reaction to that of

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[510] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Later printing, edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1932), 473 (1315a26-30).

[511] A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2001), 35–37.

the Academy and Lyceum.[512] For example, consider the Peripatetic doctrine of the eternity of the phenomenal world. This doctrine struck the early Stoics as contrary to the observable change that occurred in nature. This, in addition to the Stoic acceptance of materialism, lead to their rejection of Peripatetic cosmology. They did, however agree with the Academy and the Lyceum that "the orderliness of nature points to the existence of a source of motion which is eternal and rational."[513] This led to the postulation of what the early Stoics called the *pyr technikon* (the "creative fire") which was a rational, eternal, and self-moving substance. The apparently self-moving nature of fire made it an ideal candidate for this core component of Stoic cosmology. This interest in fire in turn made Heraclitus, the Pre-Socratic most associated with statements about fire, an attractive source for these early Stoic thinkers. As monists, they were at pains to explain how *diverse* phenomena could exist when there was only one material principle underlying *all* phenomena. Thus, another feature that made Heraclitus attractive to early Stoics is something we can see throughout his fragments: his insistence on the underlying unity between apparently diverse things. This is the Heraclitus who said things like DK10 (**Conjoinings: wholes and not wholes, converging and diverging, harmonious dissonant; and out of all things one, and out of one all things)** and DK50 (**After you have listened not to me** (*emos*) **but to the account** (*logos*)**, it is wise to recognize** (*homologein*) **that all things are one).**

The early thinkers of this school were also interested in ethical side of Heraclitus. We can see this in one of their core ethical doctrines about the "end" (i.e. the purpose) of human life. The founder himself Zeno of Citium declared that the end of life is "'living in agreement.' This is living in accordance with one concordant reason since those who live in conflict are unhappy."[514] His

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[512] Long, 45.

[513] Long, 45.

[514] A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1: Translations of the Principal Sources, with Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge Cambridgeshire ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 394.

successor, Cleanthes of Assos supposedly "added 'with nature' and represented it as follows: 'the end is living in agreement with nature.'"[515] In either case, we have a clear parallel with the ideas of Heraclitus. Implicitly, this Stoic idea can follow from the numerous Heraclitean exhortations to follow the *logos* and the connections between the *logos*, nature, and the divine throughout the fragments. Explicitly, however, we have DK112: **To be moderate** [*sophronein*[516]]**: the greatest virtue. / Wisdom: to speak the truth and to act in conformity with the nature** [*physin*] [scil. of each thing]**, understanding it.** The first line is easily translatable into the Stoic emphasis on self-control, while the second line seems like a version of the quotations from Zeno and Cleanthes above. I submit that in addition to their attraction Heraclitus' cosmology, the Stoics also adapted or adopted his ethical ideas.

Of all the Stoics, this impact of Heraclitus' ethical and political ideas is most obvious in Cleanthes. Cleanthes of Assos (c. 330 B.C.E. – c. 230 B.C.E.) was the successor of Zeno of Citium and the second head (scholarch) of the Stoic school in Greece. His *Hymn to Zeus* is replete with references to Heraclitus and outright imitations of his language. In the second paragraph he describes the cosmos under Zeus:

> All this cosmos, as it spins around the earth, obeys you, whichever way you lead, and willingly submits to your sway. Such is the double-edged fiery ever-living thunderbolt [*ampheke puroeit aeizonta keraunon*] which you hold at the ready in your unvanquished hands. For under its strokes [*pleges*] all the works of nature [*physeos*] are accomplished. With it you direct the universal reason [*koinos logos*] which runs through all things [*dia panton*] and intermingles with the lights of heaven both great and small…[517]

References to Zeus as the director of nature and wisest of the gods abound in Heraclitus. We can compare the Hymn's opening line referring to "many-titled [*polyonome* lit. having many names], ever

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[515] Long and Sedley, 394. The idea may also be traced back to the Cynics for whom living according to nature meant abandonment of human conventions in favor divine/natural mores. That the Stoics rejected this view of the idea I believe may be further evidence that the Stoics took from Heraclitus the notion that politics and cities were natural features of human life and not mere constructs or constraints on it.

[516] A word that can also mean "thinking well" or "being of sound mind."

[517] Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1*, 326.

omnipotent Zeus, prime mover of nature, who with your law steer [*kubernon*] all things [*panta*]" to DK32 where Heraclitus he declares that **One thing, what is wise: it does not want and does want to be called only by the name** [*onoma*] **of Zeus.** The same line of the Hymn also references DK41: **One thing, what is wise: to know the thought** (*gnome*) **that steers** [*ekubernese*] **all things through all things** [*panta dia panta*]**.**

The "double-edged fiery ever-living thunderbolt" of the *Hymn* suggests a combination of "ever-living" fire of DK30 (**This world order** [*kosmon*]**, the same for all, none of the gods or humans made it, but it always was and is and will be: fire ever-living** [*pur aeizon*]**, kindled in measures and extinguished in measures**) and the "thunderbolt" of DK64: **All these things the thunderbolt** [*keraunos*] **steers.** The "stroke" or "blow" (*plege*) referred to in the next line is a clear reference to DK11: **Every beast is driven to pasture by blows** [*plege*]. Finally, the *koinos logos,* the "universal" or "common" reason of the last line is a core Heraclitean doctrine found in numerous fragments but most especially DK2 and DK114 both of which we have discussed at great length in previous chapters.

Cleanthes goes on, in the third paragraph, to add a more explicitly moral dimension to this cosmology, again drawing directly on Heraclitus:

> No deed is done on earth, gods, without your offices… save what bad men do in their folly [*anoia*]. But you know how to make things crooked straight and to order things disorderly. You love things unloved. For you have so welded into one all things good and bad that they all share in a single everlasting reason. It is shunned and neglected by the bad among mortal men, the wretched, who ever yearn for the possession of goods yet neither see nor hear god's universal law [*koinon nomon*], by obeying which they could lead a good life in partnership with intelligence [*nō,* a contracted form of *noos*]]. Instead, devoid of intelligence, they rush into this evil or that, some in their belligerent quest for fame, others with an unbridled bent for acquisition, others for leisure and the pleasurable acts of the body . . . <But all that they achieve is evils,> despite travelling hither and thither in burning quest of the opposite.[518]

[518] Long and Sedley, 326–27.

The "welding" of good and bad things together again recalls the Heraclitean theme of the unity of opposites. The reference to "universal law" [*koinon nomon*] is like the divine guardianship of human law Heraclitus wrote about in DK114. In a similar vein, life in "partnership with intelligence" versus those that "lack intelligence" recalls numerous fragments where Heraclitus criticizes the lack of intelligence or understanding [*noos*] of this or that group (e.g. DK40- polymaths, DK104- bards, and DK2/114 – those who claim a "private wisdom.") The list of goals of those that lack intelligence fame, acquisition, and pleasure clearly recalls DK29: **The best men choose one thing instead of all others, the ever-flowing fame of mortals; but most men are sated like cattle.** At least if we conclude, as I and Sider[519] do, that DK29 is a critique of *both* groups mentioned in the fragments. Overall, Cleanthes emphasis in this paragraph is consistent with Heraclitus. Both thinkers agree that both wisdom and good things are "common" and not idiosyncratic. Those that seek "private" wisdom or "private" good are doomed to fail. They achieve only evil despite their "burning quest of the opposite."

Even the final paragraph of the *Hymn to Zeus* has references to Heraclitus. Cleanthes writes: "Let us achieve the power of judgment [*gnome*] by trusting in which you steer all things with justice … For neither men nor gods have any greater privilege than this: to sing for ever in righteousness of the universal law [*koinos nomos*]." The appeal to Zeus to give us the "power of judgment" directly recalls DK78: **The human character does not possess judgments** (*gnomai*)**, but the divine one**

[519] Sider's analysis of DK29 is as follows. A passive reading suggests that Heraclitus is recommending the behavior of glory seeking nobility over the cattle-like *hoi polloi*. Yet if we have learned nothing else about Heraclitus, passive reading is the wrong reading. Accordingly, Sider submits that DK29 is not as classist as it first appears; he offers the following alternative analysis of this fragment. First, *aristoi* need not refer to the noble *class*. Instead, it could be read to mean a singular "best" as in an exemplar of virtue or wisdom. Second, there is no evidence that the *aristoi* and *polloi* clauses need to be read as contrasting. David Sider, "Heraclitus' Ethics," in *Doctrine and Doxography: Studies on Heraclitus and Pythagoras*, ed. David Sider and Dirk Obbink (Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 333. Heraclitus could just as easily be criticizing *both* classes or as Sider argues, both clauses could be criticizing the nobility: "the second clause, following the first as explained above, can now be rendered 'and the majority [sc. of them, the *aristoi*] glut themselves like cattle.'" Sider, 327. This would be in keeping with many fragments (several of which we have discussed herein) where Heraclitus scolds others for their failings. Third, we can see in other fragments, Heraclitus seems to praise a singular "best" as a moral exemplar that should be listened to for the sake of the common good. Sider, 327. Accordingly, Heraclitus seems to be recommending that people follow a singular moral exemplar if they wish to pursue an ethical life.

possesses them. The *Hymn* expands on this thought to suggest that by trusting in the "steering" of Zeus (another reference to DK64) with "justice" (a theme of: DK80 – conflict is justice, DK94—the sun kept in line by justice, DK23—the connection between justice and unjust acts, and DK28B – justice will punish liars) can grant us the power of judgment that Heraclitus says we lack. The last sentence is yet another appeal the "common" *logos/nomos* which features prominently in Heraclitus' fragments.

Outside the *Hymn to Zeus*, Cleanthes' additions to Stoicism have a Heraclitean flair to them. Controlling the passions was "a basic principle of all Greek ethics, popular and philosophical."[520] The Stoics, however, are notorious for the dim view of the role the passions play in vice and unhappiness. We can see this critique at least as early as Cleanthes. Consider the following poem laying out the Stoic position on the passions:

> What is it Passion, that you want? Tell me this.
> I want, Reason? To do everything I want.
> A royal wish; but tell me again.
> Whatever I desire I want to happen.[521]

Passion acts like a would-be king; its "royal wish" is to get literally everything that it wants. This plainly is not possible; thus Passion proves that it needs to be reined in, probably by Reason. The most obvious parallel is between the last line of Cleanthes' poem and DK110: **For humans, that whatever they wish happens is not better**. Passion wants precisely what Heraclitus cautions against in DK110.[522]

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[520] Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1*, 419.

[521] Long and Sedley, 413.

[522] There are connections to other fragments as well. Although not a direct parallel, Passion is like the drunk man described in DK117: **When a man has become drunk, he is led stumbling by a slave, a mere boy: he does not know where he is going, his soul is wet.** Like a man whose passions are in control, the drunk cannot direct his own actions. A more direct parallel is DK85: **To fight against ardor** (*thumos*) **is hard: for whatever it wants, it purchases it at the price of the soul** [i.e. of life].

The Stoics famously declared that a city was defined by (1) people living in the same place (2) governed by laws. Cleanthes puts the matter in a rather circuitous manner:

> If a city is a habitable structure, in which people who take refuge have access to the dispensation of justice, a city is surely something civilized; but a city is this sort of habitation; therefore a city is something civilized.[523]

In Chapter 3, we discussed in detail how Heraclitus' notion of the *polis* was deeply informed by the community-generating effect of the law. For Heraclitus, **The people must fight for their law just as for their city wall** (DK44), and he compares the law of a city to the *logos*; both are something that is common for all (DK114). We have already seen from the *Hymn to Zeus*, the importance that Cleanthes placed on the moral importance of law, this syllogism merely serves to reinforce that connection and the connection between Heraclitus and Cleanthes.

Although Cleanthes was the Stoic most overtly impacted by Heraclitus' writings, his work is not the only place we can find the pull of the Ephesian's ideas. Chrysippus, for example, makes a version of the unity of opposites part of Stoic doctrine in his *On Providence*:

> There is absolutely nothing more foolish than those who think that there could have been goods without the coexistence of evils. For since goods are opposite to evils, the two must necessarily exist in opposition to each other and supported by a kind of opposed interdependence. And there is no such opposite without its matching opposite. For how could there be perception of justice if there were no injustices? What else is justice, if not the removal of injustice?[524]

There is an obvious affinity between Chrysippus calling people foolish to think goods could exist without evils and say DK8: [W]**hat is opposed converges, and that the most beautiful harmony** (*harmonia*) **comes out of what diverges, and that all things come about by strife** or DK111**: Illness makes health sweet and good, hunger does so for satiety, toil for repose.** Indeed, just about any statement of the unity of opposites will do, since they all point to, as Chrysippus puts it, "a kind of opposed interdependence." It is in the last two sentences, however, that we can detect the

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[523] Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1*, 431.

[524] Long and Sedley, 329.

clearest resonances of Heraclitus; we clearly hear DK23: **They would not know the name of Justice if these things** [i.e. unjust actions] **did not exist.** Chrysippus, no less than Heraclitus, could not have helped notice that the whole point of justice was to make whole what was wronged by injustice. In a sense, both Heraclitus and Chrysippus are looking beyond the words used, to the phenomena themselves. By the words alone, justice (*dike*) precedes injustice (*adikia*) since in English and Greek, the latter is the verbal negation of the former. In the social world justice operates in, however, justice is only necessary if some injustice has been committed. Its purpose is to heal what has been broken. If nothing breaks, there is no need for healing.

The law must be "fixed" when its broken by injustice. Hence, we can see the connection between the Stoic talk of unity of opposites and their treatment of law, much like the connection we find in Heraclitus. Chrysippus says in the opening of his *On Law*:

> Law is king of all things human and divine. Law must preside over what is honourable and base, as ruler and as guide, and thus be the standard of right and wrong, prescribing to animals whose nature is political what they should do, and prohibiting them from what they should not do.

Calling "law" the "king of all things human and divine" not only recalls the traditional epithet of Zeus, but also DK53 (**War is the father of all and the king of all …**). The conflict averse Stoics were probably hesitant to follow Heraclitus' foregrounding of the role of conflict in the natural and social world, thus Chrysippus has reworked Heraclitus' language for Stoic ends. "[P]rescribing to animals who nature is political what they should do…" clearly recalls Aristotle's definition of man as a *zoon politikon*, but it also could be a callback to Cleanthes use of DK11 (**Every beast is driven to pasture by blows**) in the *Hymn to Zeus*. It reinforces the idea of law not just as a remedy for resolving disputes between individuals, but as a moral force which promotes good behavior.

To close our discussion of Heraclitus' impact on the Stoics, we turn to a thinker who is a source for some of his fragments: the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. Aurelius presided over the

empire in the second century C.E. prosecuting its seemingly endless wars against the Germanic tribes.[525] In his *Meditations* he seems to be influenced by Heraclitus in the following passage on the "end" of human life:

> (1) Each thing <is made with a view to that> for whose sake it is constituted; (2) and each thing is moved towards that with a view to which it is constituted; (3) and its end consists in that towards which it is moved; (4) and where its end is, there too exists its interest and its good. (5) Therefore the good of a rational being is community; (6) for it has long been proved that we are born with a view to community. (7) Or was it not evident that inferior beings are for the sake of the superior, and the superior for the sake of one another? (8) But animate beings are superior to inanimate, and rational to merely animate.[526]

Aurelius in his somewhat unclear way is arguing that since human beings are rational, animate beings, our end is one another (i.e. community). Heraclitus declared that (DK113) **Thinking** (*phroneein*) **is in common for all**, but although this is the case, people act as if it were a private, and not communal matter (DK2). He contrasts those who recognize the common, the "awake," with those who do not, the asleep (DK89: Heraclitus says that **those who are awake have a world that is one and in common, but that each of those who are asleep turns aside into his own particular world**). In other words, he shares Aurelius' conclusion that a proper object of human striving is community. It is thus with Aurelius that the Stoic formula "living in accordance with nature" takes on its most Heraclitean tone. To live in accordance with nature for Heraclitus would be to live in accordance with the common; to promote what is best for the community over private desires.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that Heraclitus had intriguing early thoughts on politics and the ethics of citizenship. We have seen that his metaphysical emphasis on the "common" is also present

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[525] Rachana Kamtekar, "Marcus Aurelius," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/marcus-aurelius/.

[526] Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1*, 397.

in his political and ethical thinking. There the "common" takes the form of something like a "common good" shared by the diverse and conflicting classes and citizens of a *polis*. His emphasis on the importance of the law is an extension of this thinking and thus he appears to be an early advocate of something like the rule of law.

We also saw that, contrary to some previous accounts, later thinkers took note and were influenced by these political and ethical ideas. Democritus, often credited as the earliest ethicist in Greek philosophy, clearly borrows Heraclitus' language and several of his concerns. Plato too also borrows from Heraclitus, but more subtly, reworking the Ephesian's ideas where he thought necessary. Although the influence is smaller, Heraclitus clearly influenced Aristotle. We can see part of his dispute with Plato in the *Politics* as an interpretive debate about Heraclitus. A *polis* should have a common good, but what things need to *be in common*? Finally, the Stoics borrowed liberally from Heraclitus political and ethical ideas. A borrowing which is clearest in Cleanthes *Hymn to Zeus* but is also detectable as late as Marcus Aurelius' declaration that the good of a rational being is community. While all these later thinkers make more elaborate claims than Heraclitus, we can see in all of them core ideas that he originated about law, justice, the common, *logos*, *nous*, the role of the divine in human institutions, etc.

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ABSTRACT

RECOVERING HERACLITUS: NEGLECTED RELIGIOUS, ETHICAL AND POLITICAL THEMES IN THE WORK OF A PRE-SOCRATIC THINKER

by

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The early Greek philosopher Heraclitus writes in a puzzling, cryptic way which makes his ideas difficult to work out. Many commentators are content to make some broad statements about his place in the development of philosophy as a natural philosopher or metaphysician; statements for which there is ample support.

In this essay, I argue that we can use Heraclitus' biography and his historical context to recover his ideas about religion, ethics, and politics. I believe that this method reveals a Heraclitus who was grasping for an early sort of political theory and ethics in response to the turbulent period in which he lived. I also believe that the religious practices at Eleusis and Delphi inspired Heraclitus to express his ideas in the cryptic way that he does. In short, I argue that he was borrowing the oracular ambiguity of Delphi to make his readers metaphorical "initiates" into his ideas in a way modeled on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Further, I examine the way in which Heraclitus ideas arguably influenced later thinkers from Democritus to the Stoics. Each taking this or that aspect of Heraclitus' thought to shape their own ideas about value and/or politics.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Born and raised in Port Huron, Michigan, I graduated from Albion College with Albion College Honors in 2003 with a double major in English and Philosophy. There I completed an Honors Thesis entitled "Limbic Systems and Value Judgment" defending the trend in philosophy which is now called "experimental philosophy." In 2006 I received a J.D. from Michigan State University. Subsequently, I practiced law for over four years at a small firm that handled mostly municipal, education, and corporate law. In 2012, I decided to leave the practice of law for academic pursuits: graduate seminars in philosophy at Michigan State University. In 2013, Wayne State University's Department of Philosophy accepted me into its Ph.D. program. Since 2014 I have served as graduate teaching assistant and instructor for courses on Professional Ethics and Critical Thinking at Wayne State University. My research interests include, of course, ancient philosophy, but also ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of science, and various other areas.