Heraclitus of Ephesus

Even in antiquity, Heraclitus (born c. 540 B.C.) was seen as obscure and difficult to understand. He proposed an intricate world-view according to which a divine logos governs the universe and flux underlies superficial stability. Below is a selection of the surviving fragments of Heraclitus. The following translations are from *A Presocratics Reader: Selected Fragments and Testimonia*, P. Curd, R. D. McKirahan [Hackett, 2011].

Although this logos holds always humans prove unable to understand it both before hearing it and when they have first heard it. For although all things come to be [or, “happen”] in accordance with this logos, humans are like the inexperienced when they experience such words and deeds as I set out, distinguishing each thing in accordance with its nature (physis) and saying how it is. But other people fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.132 = DK 22 B 1)

For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the logos is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding. (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 7.133 = DK 22 B2)

We would call oxen happy when they find bitter vetch to eat. (Albertus Magnus, *On Vegetables* 6.401 = DK 22 B4)

What is opposed brings together; the finest harmony [harmonia] is composed of things at variance, and everything comes to be [or, “occurs”] in accordance with strife. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.2 1155b4 = DK 22 B8)

Asses would choose rubbish rather than gold. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10.5 1176a7 = DK 22 B9)

Things taken together are whole and not whole, <something that is> being brought together and brought apart, in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity and out of a unity all things. ([Aristotle], *On the World* 5 396b20 = DK 22 B10)

Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and again different waters flow. (Arius Didymus, fr. 39.2 = Dox. Gr. 471.4–5 = DK 22 B12)

Pigs rejoice in mud more than in pure water. (Clement, *Miscellanies* 1.2.2 = DK 22 B13)

This kosmos, the same for all, none of gods nor humans made, but it was always and is and shall be: an ever-living fire, kindled in measures and extinguished in measures. (Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.103.3; tpc = DK 22 B30)
For souls to become water is to die; for water to become earth is to die; but from earth, water comes to be; from water, soul. (Clement, Miscellanies 6.17.2; tpc = DK 22 B36)

Pigs wash themselves in mud, birds in dust or ash. (Columella, On Agriculture 8.4.4 = DK 22 B37)

Much learning ["polymathy"] does not teach insight. Otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras and moreover Xenophanes and Hecataeus. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.1 = DK 22 B 40)

The wise is one (to sophon), to know the intelligent plan (gnōmē) by which all things are steered through all. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.1; tpc = DK 22 B41)

Heraclitus said that Homer deserved to be expelled from the contests and flogged, and Archilochus likewise. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.1 = DK 22 B42)

Willful violence [hubris] must be quenched more than a fire. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.3 = DK 22 B43)

The people must fight for the law as for the city wall. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.2 = DK 22 B44)

You would not discover the limits of the soul although you travelled every road: so deep a logos does it have. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.7 = DK 22 B45)

[He said that] conceit is a holy disease3 [and that] sight tells falsehoods. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.7 = DK 22 B46)

Let us not make random conjectures about the greatest matters. (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Philosophers 9.73 = DK 22 B47)

The name of the bow is life, but its work is death. (Etymologium Magnum sv bios = DK 22 B48)

We step into and we do not step into the same rivers. We are and we are not. (Heraclitus Homericus, Homeric Questions 24 = DK 22 B49a)

Listening not to me, but to the logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one. (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 9.9.1 = DK B50)

They do not understand how, though at variance with itself, it agrees with itself. It is a backwards-turning attunement like that of the bow and lyre. (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 9.9.2 = DK 22 B51)
Most men’s teacher is Hesiod. They are sure he knew most things—a man who could not recognize day and night; for they are one. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.2 = DK 22 B57)

The road up and the road down are one and the same. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.4 = DK 22 B60)

The sea is the purest and most polluted water: to fishes drinkable and bringing safety, to humans undrinkable and destructive. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.5 = DK 22 B61)

Thunderbolt steers all things. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.7 = DK 22 B64)

Fire is want and satiety. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.7 = DK 22 B65)

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger, but changes the way <fire,(?)> when mingled with perfumes, is named according to the scent of each. (Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.10.8 = DK 22 B67)

Fire lives the death of earth and ær lives the death of fire, water lives the death of ær, earth that of water. (Maximus of Tyre, 41.4 = DK 22 B76)

It is necessary to know that war is common and justice is strife and that all things happen in accordance with strife and necessity. (Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.42 = DK 22 B80)

The most beautiful of apes is ugly in comparison with the human race. (Plato, *Hippias Major* 289a3–4 = DK 22 B82)

The wisest of humans will appear as an ape in comparison with a god in respect to wisdom, beauty, and all other things. (Plato, *Hippias Major* 289b4–5 = DK 22 B83)

Changing it rests. (Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1 = DK 22 B84a)

It is difficult to fight against anger, for whatever it wants it buys at the price of the soul. (Plutarch, *Life of Coriolanus* 22.2 = DK 22 B85)

The same thing is both living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old; for these things transformed are those, and those transformed back again are these. (Pseudo-Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius* 106E = DK 22 B88)

For the waking there is one common world, but when asleep each person turns away to a private one. (Pseudo-Plutarch, *On Superstition* 166c = DK 22 B89)

All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for goods. (Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 338d–e = DK 22 B90)
[It is not possible to step twice into the same river]. . . . It scatters and again comes together, and approaches and recedes. (Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 392b = DK 22 B91)

I searched [or: inquired into] myself. (Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1118C = DK 22 B101)

To god all things are beautiful and good and just, but humans have supposed some unjust and others just. (Porphyry, *Notes on Homer*, on *Iliad* 4.4 = DK 22 B102)

What understanding (*noos*) or intelligence (*phrēn*) have they? They put their trust in popular bards and take the mob for their teacher, unaware that most people are bad, and few are good. (Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Alcibiades I* 117, Westerink = DK 22 B104)

Of all those whose accounts (*logoi*) I have heard, no one reaches the point of recognizing that what is wise is set apart from all. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.174 = DK 22 B108)

It is not better for humans to get all they want. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.176 = DK 22 B110)

Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.178 = DK 22 B111)

Right thinking (*sōphronein*) is the greatest excellence, and wisdom (*sophia*) is to speak the truth and act in accordance with nature (*physis*) while paying attention to it. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.178 = DK 22 B112)

Those who speak with understanding (*noos*) must rely firmly on what is common to all as a city must rely on [its?] law, and much more firmly. For all human laws are nourished by one law, the divine law; for it has as much power as it wishes and is sufficient for all and is still left over. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.1.179 = DK 22 B114)

It belongs to all people to know themselves and to think rightly (*sōphronein*). (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.5.6 = DK 22 B116)

A man when drunk is led by a boy, stumbling and not knowing where he goes, since his soul is moist. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.5.7 = DK 22 B117)

Gleam of light: the dry soul, wisest (*sophōstate*) and best. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 3.5.8 = DK 22 B118)

A person’s character is his divinity [*daimōn*]. (Stobaeus, *Selections* 4.40.23 = DK 22 B119)

Nature (*physis*) loves to hide. (Themistius, *Orations* 5.69 = DK 22 B123)

The most beautiful *kosmos* is a pile of things poured out at random. (Theophrastus, *Metaphysics* 15 = DK 22 B124)

Even the *Kykeōn* falls apart if it is not stirred. (Theophrastus, *On Vertigo* 9; tpc = DK 22 B125)