

had so great a reputation that from it arose disciples, those called Heracliteans.

Ancient biographers and historians of philosophy assumed that all the Presocratics wrote one or more books (though there was doubt over Thales, see pp. 86ff.). They certainly assumed that Heraclitus wrote one, and Diogenes tells us that its title was 'On Nature'. This title was regularly assigned to works by those whom Aristotle and the Peripatetics called 'natural philosophers', and cannot be regarded as necessarily authentic in all cases; see pp. 102-3 n. 1. The division into three sections is unlikely to have been original, and suggests that Diogenes or his source was thinking of an edition or collection of sayings, probably made in Alexandria, which followed a Stoic analysis of the parts of philosophy. Diels maintained that Heraclitus wrote no consecutive book, but merely gave repeated utterance to a series of carefully-formulated opinions or γνώμαι. This view has found few supporters, but perhaps has an element of truth. The surviving fragments have very much the appearance of oral pronouncements put into a concise and striking, and therefore easily memorable, form; they do not resemble extracts from a continuous written work. The obstacle to this view is fr. 1 (194), a structurally complicated sentence which looks very like a written introduction to a book. Possibly when Heraclitus achieved fame as a sage a collection of his most famous utterances was made, for which a special prologue was composed. In any event the fragments we possess (and not all those in DK are fully authentic) were for the most part obviously framed as oral apophthegms rather than as parts of a discursive treatise; this was in keeping with Heraclitus' oracular intentions (see p. 210).<sup>1</sup> It also accords with his views on divine knowledge (205 and 206) and on the inability of most men to respond to the true nature of things, even when helped by a logos or account (revelation) such as Heraclitus' own. The suggestion in 192 that the 'Heracliteans', also mentioned by Plato and Aristotle, were devotees of the book is almost certainly guesswork; its importance lies in its implication that there was no 'school' of direct followers at Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> No follower of note is known until Cratylus, an older contemporary (probably) of Plato, who developed a debased form of Heracliteanism by exaggerating, and combining together, the Ephesian's belief in the inevitability of change and his belief (quite a common one in his time) in the significance of names.

<sup>1</sup> For an interesting discussion of this whole topic from a slightly different point of view, see Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), 3-9.

<sup>2</sup> In spite of 193 Plato *Theaetetus* 179D πολλοῦ καὶ δεῖ φαύλη εἶναι (sc. ἡ μάχη), ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τὴν Ἰωνίαν καὶ ἐπιδίδωσι πάμπολυ. οἱ γὰρ τοῦ Ἡρακλείτου ἑταῖροι χορηγοῦσι τούτου τοῦ λόγου μάλα ἔρρωμένως. (Cf. *ibid.* 179E, . . . αὐτοῖς μὲν τοῖς περὶ τὴν Ἐφεσον.) ([*The battle*] is far from being a slight one, but in the region of Ionia it is even greatly increasing. For the companions of Heraclitus minister to this argument with might and main. (Cf. . . . to those around Ephesus.)) This whole passage is intentionally humorous, as indeed are most of Plato's remarks about Heraclitus, and the local references need not be intended literally; anyone using what Plato would consider to be a Heraclitean type of argument might be ironically associated with Ephesus. Plato's most extreme Heraclitean acquaintance, at any rate, namely Cratylus, was neither an Ephesian nor even from Ionia.

## SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES OF INTERPRETATION

As has been seen, Heraclitus was renowned in antiquity for his obscurity. His pronouncements were undeniably often cryptic, probably intentionally so, and little serious attempt seems to have been made by Plato and Aristotle to penetrate his real meaning. Theophrastus, on whom the later doxographical tradition depends, unfortunately based his interpretation on Aristotle's. He does not appear to have had access to a complete book by Heraclitus, or even (to judge, for example, from the omission of all but the barest reference to Heraclitus in his *de sensu*) to a fully representative collection of separate utterances; in fact he complained that Heraclitus' pronouncements were either unfinished or inconsistent. The Stoics further distorted the account by adopting Heraclitus as their ancient authority on physical matters. In some respects they produced an accurate development of his ideas, for example in their ideal of ὁμολογουμένως ζῆν, living in accord with Nature (cf. e.g. 195); in others, however, they radically readapted his views to meet special requirements of their own - for example in their attribution to him of the idea of *ecpyrosis*, the periodical consumption of the whole world by fire. Our sources subsequent to the founder of Stoicism, Zeno of Citium, accepted this particular interpretation of Heraclitus, which can be reconciled with some of the extant sayings and may have been encouraged by Theophrastus, but is incompatible with others and at variance with the basic Heraclitean concept of measure in natural change; see further pp. 194ff. and n. on p. 200.

As for Plato and Aristotle, there is little *verbatim* quotation of Heraclitus in either, nor were they really interested in the accurate *objective* assessment of early predecessors. Plato occasionally mentions him, mainly in a humorous or ironical way and with emphasis on a view freely attributed to him in the dialogues, that 'all things are

in flux' – πάντα ῥεῖ or πάντα χωρεῖ. According to Aristotle at *Met.* A6, 987a32, Plato was influenced in youth by the emphasis laid by Cratylus on this kind of view. But all Presocratic thinkers were struck by the dominance of change in the world of our experience. Heraclitus was obviously no exception, indeed he probably expressed the universality of change more clearly and more dramatically than his predecessors; but for him it was the complementary idea of the *measure* inhering in change, the stability that persists through it and controls it, that was of vital importance. Plato may have been genuinely misled, especially by fifth-century sophistic exaggerations, in his distortion of Heraclitus' emphasis here; and Aristotle accepted the Platonic flux-interpretation and carried it still further. Other references to Heraclitus in Aristotle attack him for denying the law of contradiction in his assertions that opposites are 'the same'. Again, this is a misinterpretation by Aristotle, who applied his own tight logical standards anachronistically; by 'the same' Heraclitus evidently meant not 'identical' so much as 'not essentially distinct'.

In view of these defects in the authors of the ancient assessment it is safer to attempt the reconstitution of Heraclitus' thought, in the first instance, on the basis of the extant genuine fragments. Even so one cannot hope for more than a very limited understanding, partly because Heraclitus, as Aristotle found, did not use the categories of formal logic, and tended to describe the same thing (or roughly the same thing) now as a god, now as a form of matter, now as a rule of behaviour or principle which was nevertheless a physical constituent of things. He was, indeed, more of a metaphysician than his Ionian predecessors, less concerned with the mechanics of development and change than with the unifying reality that underlay them.

#### HERACLITUS' THOUGHT

(1) *Men should try to comprehend the underlying coherence of things: it is expressed in the Logos, the formula or element of arrangement common to all things*

**194** Fr. 1, Sextus *adv. math.* VII, 132 τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἔοντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκούσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπειροσιν εἰκόσασιν, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιοῦτων ὁμοίων ἐγὼ διηγέσθαι κατὰ φύσιν διαίρων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει· τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λαμβάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδοντες ἐπιλαμβάνονται.

**195** Fr. 2, Sextus *adv. math.* VII, 133 διὸ δεῖ ἐπεσθαι τῷ <ξυνῶ> τοῦ λόγου δ' ἔοντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> διὸ δεῖ ἐπεσθαι τῷ κοινῷ· ξυνὸς γὰρ ὁ κοινός· τοῦ... MSS. ξυνὸς and κοινός are different words for the same idea, the former being the normal epic and Ionic form and that used by Heraclitus. The later form was evidently given in a gloss, and then this gloss replaced the original word, though the appended explanation remained.

**196** Fr. 50, Hippolytus *Ref.* IX, 9, 1 οὐκ ἔμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφὸν ἔστιν ἐν πάντα εἶναι.

**194** Of the Logos which is as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Logos men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but the rest of men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep.

**195** Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the Logos is common the many live as though they had a private understanding.

**196** Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.

These assertions make it plain that Heraclitus regarded himself as having access to, and trying vainly to propagate, an all-important truth about the constitution of the world of which men are a part. The great majority fail to recognize this truth,<sup>1</sup> which is 'common' – that is, both valid for all things and accessible to all men, if only they use their observation and their understanding<sup>2</sup> and do not fabricate a private and deceptive intelligence. What they should recognize is the *Logos*, which is perhaps to be interpreted as the unifying formula or proportionate method of arrangement of things, what might almost be termed their structural plan both individual and in sum. The technical sense of λόγος in Heraclitus is probably related to the general meaning 'measure', 'reckoning' or 'proportion'; it cannot be simply Heraclitus' own 'account' that is in question (otherwise the distinction in **196** between ἔμοῦ and τοῦ λόγου is meaningless), although the *Logos* was revealed in that account and in a manner of speaking coincides with it. The effect of arrangement according to a common plan or measure is that all things, although apparently plural and totally discrete, are really united in a coherent complex

(196) of which men themselves are a part, and the comprehension of which is therefore logically necessary for the adequate enactment of their own lives. Yet 'formula', 'proportionate arrangement' and so on are misleadingly abstract as translations of this technical sense of λόγος. Logos was probably conceived by Heraclitus at times as an actual component of things, and in many respects it is co-extensive with the primary cosmic constituent, fire (see p. 199).

<sup>1</sup> Men are attacked for this failure in many other extant fragments: see fr. 17, 19, 28, 34, 56, 72. But nothing substantial is added there to the content of 194, 195, 196. Analogous rebukes are also hurled at individuals – Homer, Hesiod, Xenophanes, Hecataeus, Archilochus and Pythagoras; see e.g. 190 and 255, where the ground of criticism is that such men (of whom Pythagoras comes in for special attack elsewhere, cf. e.g. 256) pursued the wrong kind of knowledge, πολυμαθία or the mere collection of disparate and unrelated facts.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 197 Fr. 55, Hippolytus *Ref.* ix, 9, 5 ὄσων ὄψις ἀκοή μάθησις, ταῦτα ἐγὼ προτιμῶ. (*The things of which there is seeing and hearing and perception, these do I prefer.*) But observation must be checked by understanding, νοῦς or φρόνησις: this is shown not only by 250 but also by 198 fr. 107, Sextus *adv. math.* vii, 126 κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ καὶ ὠτα βαρβάρους ψυχῆς ἐχόντων. (*Evil witnesses are eyes and ears for men, if they have souls that do not understand their language.*) Here 'barbarian souls' are those that cannot understand the language of, cannot correctly interpret, the senses, but are misled by superficial appearances. An analogous distinction between mere sensation and the intelligent interpretation of sense-data was later made by Democritus (pp. 412–13).

(2) *Different kinds of instance of the essential unity of opposites*

199 Fr. 61, Hippolytus *Ref.* ix, 10, 5 θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθαρῶτατον καὶ μιαρῶτατον, ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον, ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον.

200 Fr. 60, Hippolytus *Ref.* ix, 10, 4 ὁδὸς ἄνω κάτω μία καὶ ὡυτή.

201 Fr. 111, Stobaeus *Anth.* iii, 1, 177 νοῦσος ὑγιείην ἐποίησεν ἡδὺ καὶ ἀγαθόν, λιμὸς κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν.

202 Fr. 88, ps.-Plutarch *Cons. ad Apoll.* 10, 106E ταῦτό τ' ἐνὶ ζῶν καὶ τεθηγκὸς καὶ τὸ ἐργηγορὸς καὶ τὸ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκείνᾳ ἐστὶ κάκεινα [πάλιν] μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα.

199 Sea is the most pure and the most polluted water; for fishes it is drinkable and salutary, but for men it is undrinkable and deleterious.

200 The path up and down is one and the same.

201 Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest.

202 And as the same thing there exists in us living and dead and the waking and the sleeping and young and old; for these things having changed round are those, and those having changed round are these.

These fragments exemplify four different kinds of connexion between evident opposites:

(i) In 199 the same thing produces opposite effects upon different classes of critic; so also fr. 13 (pigs like mud <but men do not>) and fr. 9 (donkeys prefer rubbish to gold, <men gold to rubbish>).

(ii) In 200 different aspects of the same thing may justify opposite descriptions;<sup>1</sup> so also fr. 58 (cutting and burning <which are normally bad> call for a fee when done by a surgeon) and fr. 59 (the act of writing combines straight, in the whole line, and crooked, in the shape of each letter).

(iii) In 201 good and desirable things like health or rest are seen to be possible only if we recognize their opposites, sickness or weariness; so probably fr. 23 (there would be no right without wrong).

(iv) In 202 certain opposites are said to be essentially connected (literally, to be 'the same', a pregnant expression) because they succeed, and are succeeded by, each other and nothing else. So in fr. 126 the hot substance and the cold form what we might call a hot-cold continuum, a single entity (i.e. temperature). So also fr. 57: night and day, which Hesiod had made parent and child, are, and must always have been, essentially connected and inter-dependent.

These four kinds of connexion between opposites can be further reduced to two main headings: (a) i–iii, opposites which inhere in, or are simultaneously produced by, a single subject; (b) iv, opposites which are connected through being different stages in a single invariable process.

<sup>1</sup> This seems the most probable interpretation of 'the road up and down'. Theophrastus and a few of his followers applied the phrase to the interchanges between world-masses in the cosmic process, and most modern scholars have done the same. But the same words 'one and the same' are used of evident opposites in the formally similar fr. 59; and Hippolytus, a reliable source of *verbatim* quotations from Heraclitus who seems to have used a good handbook in which the philosopher's sayings were grouped by subject, certainly took 'the road up and down' as another illustration of the unity of opposites and not as a cosmological metaphor, to which indeed it is not completely appropriate. We should think of an actual road or path, which is called 'the road up' by those who live at the bottom, 'the road down' by those at the top. Vlastos, *AJP* 76 (1955), 349 n. 26, objects to this interpretation on the grounds of its 'banality'; but fr. 59, for example, on writing, undoubtedly has precisely the same quality.

Reflections such as these (cf. also fr. 103, 48, 126, 99), on objects conventionally treated as entirely separate from and opposed to each other, evidently persuaded Heraclitus that there is *never* any real absolute division of opposite from opposite. (For a more straightforward restatement of this view by Anaxagoras see p. 371.)

(3) *Each pair of opposites thus forms both a unity and a plurality. Different pairs are also found to be inter-connected*

**203** Fr. 10, [Aristotle] *de mundo* 5, 396b20 συλλάψεις ὄλα καὶ οὐχ ὄλα, συμπερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶδον διᾶδον· ἐκ πάντων ἐν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> συλλάψεις is textually slightly preferable to συνάψεις, which would mean 'things in contact'. A more important question is whether the word is subject or predicate. Snell showed it to be the former, contrary to the common view; neither 'wholes' and 'not wholes' nor 'in tune' and 'out of tune' are typical pairs of Heraclitean opposites, nor indeed do they fall under the classes outlined on p. 189.

**204** Fr. 67, Hippolytus *Ref.* ix, 10, 8 ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός [τάναντία ἅπαντα, οὗτος ὁ νοῦς]· ἀλλοιοῦται δὲ ὄκωσπερ <πῦρ> ὀπόταν συμμιγῆ θυώμασιν ὀνομάζεται καθ' ἡδονὴν ἐκάστου. [πῦρ suppl. Diels.]

**203** Things taken together are wholes and not wholes, something which is being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things.

**204** God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger [all the opposites, this is the meaning]; he undergoes alteration in the way that fire, when it is mixed with spices, is named according to the scent of each of them.

In **203** 'things taken together' must be, primarily, opposites: what one takes together with night, for example, is day. (Here we may note that Heraclitus expresses what we should call 'quality' in terms of simple extremes, which he can then classify as opposites; so that all change can thus be regarded as that between opposites.) Such 'things taken together' are truly described in one sense as 'wholes', that is, forming one continuum, in another sense as 'not wholes', that is, as single components. Applying these alternative analyses to the conglomeration of 'things taken together', we can see that 'from all things a unity is formed', and also that from this unity (ἐξ ἑνός) there can be separated the superficial, discrete, plural aspect of things (πάντα).

**204** asserts a relationship between god and a number of pairs of opposites, each pair separately connected by automatic succession; these, as the glossator saw, probably stand for all pairs of opposites however connected. The relationship in question is a loose predicative one; and Heraclitus, perhaps enlarging on Xenophanes, seems to have regarded 'god' as in some probably undefined way immanent in things, or as the sum total of things.<sup>1</sup> One recalls the Milesian view that the originative material, which may still be represented in the world, is divine. Heraclitus, although not so explicitly corporealistic in his conception of divinity, was little more conventionally religious than the Milesians in that he did not associate 'god' with the need for cult and worship (although he did not utterly reject all cult, see pp. 209f.). The particular point of **204** is that every opposite can be expressed in terms of god: because peace is divine it does not follow that war is not equally divine, is not equally permeated by the directive and unifying constituent which is on occasions equated with the whole ordered cosmos (pp. 187f., 199). God cannot here be essentially different from Logos; and the Logos is, among other things, the constituent of things which makes them opposed, and which ensures that change between opposites will be proportional and balanced overall. God, then, is said to be the common connecting element in all extremes, just as fire is the common element of different vapours (because these were conceived as a compound of fire with different kinds of incense). Change from one to another brings about a total change of name, which is misleading, because only a superficial component has altered and the most important constituent remains. This difficult saying implies that, while each separate pair of contraries forms a single continuum, the several continua, also, are connected with each other, though in a different manner. Thus the total plurality of things forms a single, coherent, determinable complex – what Heraclitus called 'unity'.

<sup>1</sup> The superiority of god to man, and of the divine synthetic view of things to the human chaotic view, is heavily stressed by Heraclitus; e.g. **205** Fr. 78, Origen *c. Celsum* vi, 12 ἦθος γὰρ ἀνθρώπειον μὲν οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει. (*Human disposition does not have true judgement, but divine disposition does.*) See also fr. 79, 82–3, and compare the Hebrew concept: 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts', Isaiah lv. 8f. One saying specifically asserts that for god the separateness implied by opposites does not exist: **206** Fr. 102, Porphyrius *in Iliadem* iv, 4 τῷ μὲν θεῷ καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἀνθρώποι δὲ ἅ μὲν ἄδिका ὑπειλήφασιν ἅ δὲ δίκαια. (*To god all things are beautiful and good and just, but men have supposed some things to be unjust, others just.*)