

Heraclitus

Some Translations and Notes

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Translations of Some Fragments Attributed to Heraclitus

Preface

As explained in the notes that accompanied the translations, I have deliberately transliterated (instead of translated) πόλεμος, and left δίκη as δίκη - because both πόλεμος and δίκη should be regarded like ψυχή (psyche/Psyche) as terms or as principles in their own right (hence the capitalization), and thus imply, suggest, and require, interpretation and explanation, something especially true, in my opinion, regarding δίκη. To render such Greek terms blandly by English terms such as 'war' and 'justice' - which have their own now particular meaning(s) - is in my view erroneous and somewhat lackadaisical. δίκη for instance could be, depending on context: the custom(s) of a folk, judgement (or Judgement personified), the natural and the necessary balance, the correct/customary/ancestral way, and so on.

The notes to the translations are included below.

David Myatt
2012
(Revised February 2013)

Fragment 1

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ
πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκούσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ
πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπίροισιν εἰκόσασιν, πειρώμενοι καὶ
ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῦμαι κατὰ φύσιν
διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει· τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους
λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδόντες
ἐπιλανθάνονται

Although this naming and expression [which I explain] exists, human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it. Yet even though, regarding such naming and expression, I have revealed details of how Physis has been cleaved asunder, some human beings are inexperienced concerning it, fumbling about with words and deeds, just as other human beings, be they interested or just forgetful, are unaware of what they have done.

Fragment 36

ψυχῆισιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ
γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχὴ.

Where the water begins our living ends and where earth begins water ends, and yet earth nurtures water and from that water, Life.

Fragment 39

ἐν Πριήνηι Βίας ἐγένετο ὁ Τευτάμεω, οὗ πλείων λόγος ἢ τῶν ἄλλων

In Priene was born someone named and recalled as most worthy -
Bias, that son of Teutamas

Fragment 43

ὑβριν χρὴ σβεννύναι μᾶλλον ἢ πυρκαϊήν

Better to deal with your hubris before you confront that fire

Fragment 52

αἰὼν παῖς ἐστὶ παίζων πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἢ βασιληΐη

For Aeon, we are a game, pieces moved on some board: since, in this world of ours, we are but children.

Fragment 53

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

Polemos our genesis, governing us all to bring forth some gods, some mortal beings with some unfettered yet others kept bound.

Fragment 64

τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει Κεραυνός

All beings are guided by Lightning

Fragment 80

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεῶν]

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord.

Fragment 112

σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ

φύσιν ἐπαίοντας

Most excellent is balanced reasoning, for that skill can tell inner character from outer.

Fragment 123

Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

Concealment accompanies Physis

From Diogenes Laërtius - *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*

πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας
ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα (ix. 7)

All by genesis is appropriately apportioned [separated into portions]
with beings bound together again by enantiodromia

Note: I have used here a transliteration of the compound Greek word *ἐναντιοδρομίας* rather than given a particular translation, since the term enantiodromia in my view suggests the uniqueness of expression of the original, and which original in my view is not adequately, and most certainly not accurately, described by a usual translation such as 'conflict of opposites'. Rather, what is suggested is 'confrontational contest' - that is, by facing up to the expected/planned/inevitable contest. Interestingly, Carl Jung - who was familiar with the sayings of Heraclitus - used the term enantiodromia to describe the emergence of a trait (of character) to offset another trait and so restore a certain psychological balance within the individual. For further details, refer to my essay *The Change of Enantiodromia*.

The Poetry of Heraclitus Some Notes on Fragment 1

Text

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἔόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ

πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόσιν, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῖμαι κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει· τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὐδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται

Translation

My translation of the fragment is:

Although this naming and expression [which I explain] exists, human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it. Yet even though, regarding such naming and expression, I have revealed details of how Physis has been cleaved asunder, some human beings are inexperienced concerning it, fumbling about with words and deeds, just as other human beings, be they interested or just forgetful, are unaware of what they have done.

Comments

1. λόγος

In respect of fragments 80 and 112 I have suggested that it is incorrect to interpret πόλεμος simplistically as 'war', strife, or kampf ^[1] and that, instead of using such words, it should be transliterated so as to name a distinct philosophical principle that requires interpretation and explanation with particular reference to Hellenic culture and philosophy. For, more often than not, such common English words as 'war' are now understood in a non-Hellenic, non-philosophical, context and explained in relation to some ideated opposite; and in the particular case of the term 'war', for example, in contrast to some-thing named, explained, or defined, as 'peace' or a state of non-belligerence.

In respect of fragment 1 ^[2], does λόγος suggest a philosophical principle and therefore should it, like πόλεμος, be transliterated and thus be considered as a basic principle of the philosophy of Heraclitus, or at least of what, of that philosophy or weltanschauung, we can adduce from the textual fragments we possess? Or does λόγος, as I suggested in respect of fragment 112 and 123 ^[3] imply:

both a *naming* (denoting), and a *telling* - not a telling as in some abstract explanation or theory, but as in a simple describing, or recounting, of what has been so denoted or so named. Which is why, in fragment 39, Heraclitus writes:

ἐν Πριήνῃ Βίᾳς ἐγένετο ὁ Τευτάμεω, οὗ πλείων λόγος ἢ
τῶν ἄλλων [4]

and why, in respect of *λέγειν*, Hesiod wrote:

ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ', εὔτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι [5]

I contend that fragment 1 also suggests a denoting, in the sense of expressing some-thing by denoting it or describing it by a 'name'. That is, that *λόγος* here does not refer here to what has often be termed Logos, and that the 'ambiguous' *ἀεὶ* [6] is not really ambiguous at all.

For one has to, in my view, take account of the fact that there is poetry in Heraclitus; a rather underrated style that sometimes led others to incorrectly describe him as *ὁ σκοτεινός*, the ambiguous (or the obtuse) one, and led Aristotle to write:

τὰ γὰρ Ἡρακλείτου διαστίζαι ἔργον διὰ τὸ ἄδηλον
εἶναι ποτέρῳ πρόσκειται, τῷ ὕστερον ἢ τῷ πρότερον, οἷον ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ
αὐτῇ τοῦ συγγράμματος:
φησὶ γὰρ "τοῦ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι ἄνθρωποι γίνονται":
ἄδηλον γὰρ τὸ ἀεὶ, πρὸς ποτέρῳ δεῖ διαστίζαι. [6]

It is the poetic style of Heraclitus that I have tried, however badly, to express in my often non-literal and rather idiosyncratic translations/interpretations of some of the fragments attributed to him. Hence my interpretation of the first part:

Although this naming and expression [which I explain] exists - human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it.

The 'which I explain' being implicit in the sense of *λόγος* here as a naming and expression by a particular individual, contrasted (as often with Heraclitus) rather poetically with a generality; in this instance, contrasted with human beings - 'men' - in general.

2. ἀεὶ

In my view, "tend to" captures the poetic sense of ἀεὶ here. That is, the literal - the bland, strident - 'always' is discarded in favour of a more Heraclitean expression of human beings having an apparently rather irreconcilable tendency - both now and as in the past - to ignore (or forget or not understand) certain things, even after matters have been explained to them (they have heard the explanation) and even after they have discovered certain truths for themselves.

3. διαίρεων and Φύσις

I take the sense of διαίρεων here somewhat poetically to suggest not the ordinary 'divide' but the more expressive 'cleave', with it being undivided Physis that is cleaved into parts by "such naming and expression" as Heraclitus has revealed. That is, Heraclitus is not saying that he has described or expressed each thing 'in accordance with its true nature' (or divided things correctly, or something of the kind) but rather that the process of naming and categorization is or has divided Physis, obscuring the true nature of Being and beings, and it is this process, this obscuring, or concealment. of Physis - of cleaving it into separate parts or each thing, 'each' contrasted with a generality^[7] - that he has revealed and is mentioning here, as he mentioned it in fragment 123:

Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

Concealment accompanies Physis^[8]

Which is why I have transliterated Φύσις as referring to a general philosophical principle of the philosophy of Heraclitus, or at least of what, of that philosophy or weltanschauung, we can adduce from the textual fragments we possess.

4. πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων

In respect of ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, the Homeric usage^[9] is, for me, interesting as it implies a proverbial kind of saying rather than just 'words' and 'deeds':

Τηλέμαχ', οὐδ' ὄπιθεν κακὸς ἔσσειαι οὐδ' ἀνοήμων,
εἰ δὴ τοι σοῦ πατρὸς ἐνέστακται μένος ἦύ,
οἷος κεῖνος ἔην τελέσαι ἔργον τε ἔπος τε:

Telemachus - you will not be unlucky nor lacking in resolution
If you hereafter instill into yourself the determination of your father
Whose nature was to accomplish those deeds he said he would.

Furthermore, I take the sense here of πειρώμενοι poetically to suggest a "fumbling about" - as the inexperienced often fumble about and experiment until, often by trial and error, they have gained sufficient experience to understand and know what they are doing and what is involved, which rather reminds one of a saying of Pindar ^[10]:

γλυκὸν δὲ πόλεμος ἀπείροισιν, ἐμπείρων δέ τις
ταρβεῖ προσιόντα νιν καρδίᾳ περισσῶ

5. ἐγερθέντες and εὔδοντες

Given that, as mentioned above, there is poetry in Heraclitus, I am inclined to avoid the literal, and usual, understanding of ἐγερθέντες and εὔδοντες, particularly given the foregoing πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων which renders such a literal understanding not only out of context and disjointed but decidedly odd. Human beings forgetting things when they sleep? If, however, and for example, ἐγείρω here poetically suggests alertness, an interest or excitement - as ἤγειρεν in the Agamemnon suggests an alertness and excitement, an interest in what has occurred, and thence the kindling of a pyre ^[11] - then there is, as often in Heraclitus, a flowing eloquence and that lack of discordance one might expect of an aphorism remembered and recorded long after the demise of its author.

David Myatt
February 2013

Notes

[1] γν. *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic, and Some Notes on Πόλεμος and Δίκη in Heraclitus B80*

As mentioned in *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic*:

"In addition, Polemos was originally the *δαίμων* [not the god] of kindred strife, whether familial, or of one's *πόλις* (one's clan and their places of dwelling). Thus, to describe Polemos, as is sometimes done, as the god of conflict (or war), is doubly incorrect."

[2] *qv. Sextus Empiricus: Advenus Mathematicos VII. 132*

[3] Regarding 123 - *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ* - *qv. Physis, Nature, Concealment, and Natural Change, e-text 2010*

[4] "In Priene was born someone named and recalled as most worthy - Bias, that son of Teutamas."

[5]

We have many ways to conceal - to name - certain things
And the skill when we wish to expose their meaning

[6] Aristotle: *Ars Rhetorica* Book 3, chapter 5 [1407b]

[7] As in Homer et al, for example *Iliad*, Book VII, 215 -

Τρῶας δὲ τρόμος αἰνὸς ὑπήλυθε γυῖα ἕκαστον

But over the Trojans, a strange fear, to shake the limbs of each one there

[8] *qv. my Physis, Nature, Concealment, and Natural Change [Notes on Heraclitus fragment 123], e-text 2010*

[9] *Odyssey*, Book II, 272

[10] Fragment 110

[11] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 296-299

σθένουσα λαμπὰς δ' οὐδέπω μαυρουμένη,
ὑπερθοροῦσα πεδίον Ἄσωποῦ, δίκην
φαιδρᾶς σελήνης, πρὸς Κιθαιρῶνος λέπας
ἤγειρεν ἄλλην ἐκδοχὴν πομποῦ πυρός.

The torch, vigorous and far from extinguished,
Bounded over the Asopian plain
To the rocks of Cithaeron as bright as the moon
So that the one waiting there to begin that fire, jumped up

Note that here the watchman is not awakened from sleep.

Some Notes on Πόλεμος and Δίκη in Heraclitus B80

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]. Fragmentum 80.

This fragment, attributed to Heraclitus, is generally considered to mean something rather abstract such as: war is everywhere and strife is justice and all that is arises and passes away because of strife.

That is, *πόλεμος* is regarded as a synonym for either *kampf*, or more generally, for war. However, I incline toward the view that this older understanding of - the accepted rendition of - *πόλεμος* is a misinterpretation, and that rather than *kampf* (struggle), or a general type of strife, or what we now associate with the term war, *πόλεμος* implies what I have elsewhere termed the acausality (a simultaneity) [1] beyond our causal ideation, and which ideation has separated object from subject, and often abstracted them into seemingly conflicting opposites [2]. Hence my particular interpretation of Fragmentum 53:

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

Polemos our genesis, governing us all to bring forth some gods, some mortal beings with some unfettered yet others kept bound.

Hence my interpretation of Fragment 80 - *εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]* -

as:

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord. [3]

Here, I have deliberately transliterated (instead of translated) *πόλεμος*, and left *δίκη* as *δίκη* - because both *πόλεμος* and *δίκη* (written *Πόλεμος* and, I suggest, *Δίκη*) should be regarded, like *ψυχή* (psyche/Psyche) as terms or as principles in their own right (hence the capitalization), and thus imply, suggest, and require, interpretation and explanation, something especially true, in my opinion, regarding *Δίκη*. To render them blandly by English terms such as 'war' and 'justice' - which have their own now particular meaning(s) - is in my view erroneous and somewhat lackadaisical. *δίκη* for instance could be, depending on context: the custom(s) of a folk, judgement (or Judgement personified), the natural and the necessary balance, the correct/customary/ancestral way, and so on.

In respect of *Δίκη*, I write it thus to intimate a new, a particular and numinous, philosophical principle, and differentiate it from the more general *δίκη*. As a numinous principle, or axiom, *Δίκη* thus suggests what lies beyond and what was the genesis of *δίκη* personified as the goddess, Judgement - the goddess of natural balance, of the ancestral way and ancestral customs.

Thus, *Δίκη* implies the balance, the reasoned judgement, the thoughtful reasoning - *σωφρονεῖν* - that *πάθει μάθος* brings and restores, and which accumulated *πάθει μάθος* of a particular folk or *πόλις* forms the basis for their ancestral customs. *δίκη* is therefore, as the numinous principle *Δίκη*, what may be said to be a particular and a necessary balance between *ἀρετή* and *ὑβρις* - between the *ὑβρις* that often results when the personal, the natural, quest for *ἀρετή* becomes unbalanced and excessive.

That is, when *ἔρις* (discord) is or becomes *δίκη* - as suggested by Heraclitus in Fragment 80.

In respect of *Πόλεμος*, it is perhaps interesting that in the recounted tales of Greek mythology attributed to Aesop, and in circulation at the time of Heraclitus, a personified *πόλεμος* (as the *δαίμων* of kindred strife) married a personified *ὑβρις* (as the *δαίμων* of arrogant pride) [4] and that it was a common folk belief that *πόλεμος* accompanied *ὑβρις* - that is, that Polemos followed Hubris around rather than vice versa, causing or bringing *ἔρις*.

As a result of *ἔρις*, there often arises *πάθει μάθος* - that practical and personal

knowing, that reasoned understanding which, according to Aeschylus [5] is the new law, the new understanding, given by Zeus to replace the older more religious and dogmatic way of fear and dread, often viewed as *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες* [6]. A new understanding which Aeschylus sought to explain in the *Oresteia*.

Therefore one can perhaps understand and appreciate the true and acausal nature of *Πόλεμος* which, as suggested by Fragment 53, is a natural principle (or 'energy' or a manifestation of Being) which affects, or governs, all mortals and which, as suggested by Fragment 80, causes the manifestation of beings from Being (the causal separation of beings) and which natural separation results in *ἔρις* and thence, as suggested by Fragment 123 [7] a return to Being; a return which can result, as suggested by Fragment 112 [8] arise from thoughtful reasoning [*σωφρονεῖν*] - and which thoughtful, balanced, reasoning can incline us toward not committing *ὑβρις*.

David Myatt
April 2011

Notes

[1] For the axiom of acausality, see my *Introduction to The Philosophy of The Numen*.

[2] For an outline of opposites, refer to my essay *The Abstraction of Change as Opposites and Dialectic*.

[3] Some alternative renderings of this fragment are:

One should be aware that polemos is pervasive; and discord *δίκη*, and that beings [our being] quite naturally come-into-being through discord

One should be aware that polemos pervades; with discord *δίκη*, and that all beings are begotten because of discord.

[4] A *δαίμων* is not one of the pantheon of major Greek gods - *θεοί* - but rather a lesser type of divinity who might be assigned by those gods to bring good fortune or misfortune to human beings and/or watch over certain human beings

and especially particular numinous (sacred) places.

Furthermore, Polemos was originally the *δαίμων* of kindred strife, whether familial, or of one's *πόλις* (one's clan and their places of dwelling). Thus, to describe Polemos, as is sometimes done, as the god of conflict (or war), is doubly incorrect.

[5] Agamemnon, 174-183. qv. my essay, *From Aeschylus To The Numinous Way - The Numinous Authority of πάθει μάθος*

[6] Aeschylus (attributed), *Prometheus Bound*, 515-6

[7] *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ* - *Concealment accompanies Physis*. See my *Physis, Nature, Concealment, and Natural Change*.

[8] *σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μεγίστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας*

For this fragment, see my essay *The Balance of Physis - Notes on λόγος and ἀληθέα in Heraclitus*.

The Balance of Physis - Notes on λόγος and ἀληθέα in Heraclitus

Part One - Fragment 112

σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μεγίστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας. ^[1]

Most excellent is balanced reasoning, for that skill can tell inner character from outer.

This fragment is interesting because it contains what some regard as the philosophically important words *σωφρονεῖν*, *ἀληθέα*, *φύσις* and *λόγος*.

The fragment suggests that what is most excellent [*ἀρετὴ*] is thoughtful reasoning [*σωφρονεῖν*] - and such reasoning is both (1) to express (reveal)

meaning and (2) that which is in accord with, or in sympathy with, *φύσις* – with our nature and the nature of Being itself.

Or, we might, perhaps more aptly, write – such reasoning is both an expressing of inner meaning (essence), and expresses our own, true, nature (as thinking beings) and the balance, the nature, of Being itself.

λέγειν [*λόγος*] here does not suggest what we now commonly understand by the term 'word'. Rather, it suggests both *a naming* (denoting), and *a telling* – not a telling as in some abstract explanation or theory, but as in a simple describing, or recounting, of what has been so denoted or so named. Which is why, in fragment 39, Heraclitus writes:

ἐν Πριήνῃ Βίᾳς ἐγένετο ὁ Τευτάμεω, οὗ πλείων λόγος ἢ τῶν ἄλλων
[2]

and why, in respect of *λέγειν*, Hesiod [see below under *ἀληθέα*] wrote:

*ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι* [3]

φύσις here suggests the Homeric [4] usage of nature, or character, as in Herodotus (2.5.2):

Αἰγύπτου γὰρ φύσις ἐστὶ τῆς χώρας τοιήδε

but also suggests *Φύσις* (Physis) – as in fragment 123; the natural nature of all beings, beyond their outer appearance.

ἀληθέα – commonly translated as truth – here suggests (as often elsewhere) an exposure of *essence*, of the reality, the meaning, which lies behind the outer (false) appearance that covers or may conceal that reality or meaning, as in Hesiod (*Theog*, 27-28):

*ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ', εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι* [3]

σωφρονεῖν here suggests balanced (or thoughtful, measured) reasoning – but not according to some abstract theory, but instead a reasoning, a natural way or manner of reasoning, in natural balance with ourselves, with our nature as thinking beings.

Most importantly, perhaps, it is this *σωφρονεῖν* which can incline us toward not committing *ὑβρις* (hubris; insolence), which *ὑβρις* is a going beyond the natural limits, and which thus upsets the natural balance, as, for instance, mentioned by Sophocles:

*ὑβρις φυτεύει τύραννον:
ὑβρις, εἰ πολλῶν ὑπερπλησθῆ μάταν,
ἄ μὴ 'πίκαιρα μηδὲ συμφέροντα,
ἀκρότατον εἰσαναβάσ'
αἶπος ἀπότομον ὄρουσεν εἰς ἀνάγκαν,
ἔνθ' οὐ ποδὶ χρησίμῳ
χρῆται* ^[5]

It therefore not surprising that Heraclitus considers, as expressed in fragment 112, the best person - the person with the most excellent character (that is, *ἀρετῆ*) - is the person who, understanding and appreciating their own true nature as a thinking being (someone who can give names to - who can denote - beings, and express or recount that denoting to others), also understands the balance of Being, the true nature of beings [cf. fragment 1 - *κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον*], and who thus seeks to avoid committing the error of hubris, but who can not only also forget this understanding, and cease to remember such reasoning:

*τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ
πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκούσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον* ^[6]

but who can also deliberately, or otherwise, conceal what lies behind the names (the outer appearance) we give to beings, to 'things'.

DW Myatt
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Notes:

[1] Fragmentum B 112 - *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. H. Diels, Berlin 1903

[2] "In Priene was born someone named and recalled as most worthy - Bias, that son of Teutamas."

[3]

We have many ways to conceal - to name - certain things
And the skill when we wish to expose their meaning

[4] *Odyssey*, Book 10, vv. 302-3

[5] "Insolence plants the tyrant. There is insolence if by a great foolishness there is a useless over-filling which goes beyond the proper limits. It is an ascending to the steepest and utmost heights and then that hurtling toward that Destiny where the useful foot has no use..." (Oedipus Tyrannus, vv.872ff)

[6] "Although this naming and expression, which I explain, exists - human beings tend to ignore it, both before and after they have become aware of it." (Fragment 1)

Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ
Physis, Nature, Concealment, and Natural Change

The phrase *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ* - attributed to Heraclitus [See Note 1] - is often translated along the following lines: Nature loves to conceal Herself (or, Nature loves to hide).

Such a translation is somewhat inaccurate, for several reasons.

First, as used here, by Heraclitus, the meaning of *Φύσις* is rather different from his other usage of the term, as such usage is known to us in other fragments of his writings. For the sense here is of *Φύσις* rather than *φύσις* - a subtle distinction that is often overlooked; that is, what is implied is that which is the origin behind the other senses, or usages, of the term *φύσις*.

Thus, *Φύσις* (Physis) is not simply what we understand as Nature; rather, Nature is one way in which *Φύσις* is manifest, presented, to us: to we human beings who possess the faculty of consciousness and of reflexion (Thought). That is, what we term Nature [See Note 2] has the being, the attribute, of Physis.

As generally used - for example, by Homer - *φύσις* suggests the character, or nature, of a thing, especially a human being; a sense well-kept in English, where Nature and nature can mean two different things (hence one reason to capitalize Nature). Thus, we might write that Nature has the nature of Physis.

Second, *κρύπτεσθαι* does not suggest a simple concealment, some intent to

conceal - as if Nature was some conscious (or anthropomorphic) thing with the ability to conceal Herself. Instead, *κρύπτεσθαι* implies a natural tendency to, the innate quality of, being - and of becoming - concealed or un-revealed.

Thus - and in reference to fragments 1 and 112 - we can understand that *κρύπτεσθαι* suggests that *φύσις* has a natural tendency (the nature, the character) of being and of becoming un-revealed to us, even when it has already been revealed, or dis-covered.

How is or can *Φύσις* (Physis) be uncovered? Through *λόγος* (cf. fragments 1, and 112).

Here, however, *logos* is more than some idealized (or moralistic) *truth* [*ἀληθέα*] and more than is implied by our term *word*. Rather, *logos* is the activity, the seeking, of the essence - the nature, the character - of things [*ἀληθέα* akin to Heidegger's revealing] which essence also has a tendency to become covered by words, and an abstract (false) truth [an abstraction; *εἶδος* and *ιδέα*] which is projected by us onto things, onto beings and Being.

Thus, and importantly, *λόγος* - understood and applied correctly - can uncover (reveal) *Φύσις* and yet also - misunderstood and used incorrectly - serve to, or be the genesis of the, concealment of *Φύσις*. The correct *logos* - or a correct *logos* - is the ontology of Being, and the *λόγος* that is logical reasoning is an essential part of, a necessary foundation of, this ontology of Being, this seeking by *φίλος*, a friend, of *σοφόν*. Hence, and correctly, a philosopher is a friend of *σοφόν* who seeks, through *λόγος*, to uncover - to understand - Being and beings, and who thus suggests or proposes an ontology of Being.

Essentially, the nature of *Physis* is to be concealed, or hidden (something of a mystery) even though *Physis* becomes revealed, or can become revealed, by means such as *λόγος*. There is, thus, a natural change, a natural unfolding - of which Nature is one manifestation - so that one might suggest that *Physis* itself is this process [the type of being] of a natural unfolding which can be revealed and which can also be, or sometimes remain, concealed.

Third, *φιλεῖ* [*φίλος*] here does not suggest "loves" - nor even a *desire* to - but rather suggests *friend*, companion, as in Homeric usage.

In conclusion, therefore, it is possible to suggest more accurate translations of the phrase *Φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ*. All of which correctly leave *Φύσις* untranslated (as *Physis* with a capital P), since *Φύσις* is the source of certain beings [or, to be precise, *Physis* is the source of, the being behind, our apprehension of certain beings] of which being Nature is one, and of which our own, individual, character, as a particular human being, is another.

One translation is: *Concealment accompanies Physis*. Or: Concealment remains with Physis, like a friend. Another is: The natural companion of Physis is concealment.

Or, more poetically perhaps, but much less literally, one might suggest: *Physis naturally seeks to remain something of a mystery*.

DW Myatt
2010

Notes:

[1] Fragmentum B 123 - *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* ed. H. Diels, Berlin 1903. If the first letter of φύσις is not capitalized, then the phrase is φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ

Heraclitus flourished c. 545 - 475 BCE.

[2] Nature can be said to be both a type of being, and that innate, creative, force (that is, ψυχή) which animates physical matter and makes it living.

Heraclitus - Notes on Fragment 53

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους. Heraclitus, Fragmentum 53.

Polemos our genesis, governing us all to bring forth some gods, some mortal beings with some unfettered yet others kept bound.

As for Πόλεμος - while Heidegger suggested a similarity with λόγος, Πόλεμος is in my view what the λόγος that is both causal and acausal knowing can uncover, rather than λόγος itself. That is, the ἀρχή of, the changing, the presencing and re-presencing of Being which is ψυχή through Αἰών. Hence Πόλεμος is the whole, the complete, the natural, the cosmological, process which includes ἀρχή, ψυχή, Αἰών, and Φύσις, and our revealing or coming-to-know these through λόγος. That is, through that thoughtful reasoning [σωφρονεῖν], that balance (ἀρμονίη) of both a causal knowing and an acausal knowing. In other words, by means of both empathy, and also by philosophy and

experimental science. In effect, *Πόλεμος* is an expression of the acausality beyond our causal ideation, the acausal nature of which both *ψυχή* and *Αἰών* manifest [1].

It should be stressed that, correctly understood, *Πόλεμος* is, in my opinion, neither the struggle (*Kampf*) of Heidegger nor the common translation of war. Rather it suggests - as above - the fundamental acausality beyond *Phainómenon*: the presencing of Being as Change, and thus as beings, that has been interpreted, incorrectly because via causal ideation only, as a dialectic and thus as a conflict, or as conflict as idea. Neither is *Πόλεμος* the practical combat as in the *Iliad* (XVIII, 106) - contrasted with *ἔρις* in the next verse [2], as it is so contrasted in Fragment 80, attributed to Heraclitus.

As such acausality, made manifest via *ψυχή*, *Πόλεμος* may be said to be the origin of *Δίκη* [3] in a similar way to Aeschylus attributing the numinous authority of *πάθει μάθος* to Zeus [4].

Thus, our own nature as mortals is that we are part of this acausal change - we have our genesis (both our life, and our type of living) in this change, in and through and because of *Πόλεμος*.

David Myatt
2011 CE

[1] See, for example, my essays, *On The Nature of Abstraction*, and *Empathy and the Immoral Abstraction of Race*.

[2] οἶος ἐὼν οἶος οὗ τις Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων
ἐν πολέμῳ: ἀγορῇ δέ τ' ἀμείνονές εἰσι καὶ ἄλλοι.
ὡς ἔρις ἔκ τε θεῶν ἔκ τ' ἀνθρώπων ἀπόλοιτο
καὶ χόλος

[3] For a brief overview of *Δίκη*, see my essay, *On The Nature of Abstraction*.

[4] Refer, for example, to my *From Aeschylus To The Numinous Way*.

- I - Opposites and Dialectic as Abstractions
- II - The Error of Polemos as Kampf
- III - Being and Empathy

I - Opposites and Dialectic as Abstractions

For well over a hundred years there has been a belief that some kind of process, or dialectic, between or involving certain, particular, opposites might lead us to answer questions such as *Quid est Veritas?*, could lead to a certain understanding of ourselves, and may well express something of the true nature of reality, of Being itself. In varying degrees this belief is evident, for instance, in Hegel, Nietzsche (with his *Wille zur macht*), Marx, and those espousing the doctrine that has been termed Social Darwinism.

In addition, and for a much greater span of causal Time, this belief has been an essential part of certain religions where the process is often expressed eschatologically and in a conjectured conflict between the abstract opposites of 'good' and 'evil', God and Devil, and such things as demons and angels.

This notion of opposites, of two distinct, separate, things is much in evidence in Plato, and indeed, philosophically, the separation of beings from Being by the process of ideation and opposites may be said to have begun with Plato. For instance, he contrasts *πόλεμος* with *στάσις* (Conflict/strife contrasted with stasis/stability) thus:

ἐπὶ μὲν οὖν τῇ τοῦ οἰκείου ἔχθρα στάσις κέκληται, ἐπὶ δὲ τῇ τοῦ ἀλλοτρίου πόλεμος. Rep. V 470b

In respect of these two forms, Plato tries to explain that while there are two terms, two distinct namings - *πόλεμος* and *στάσις* - what are so denoted are not just two different names but express what he regards as the reality - the being, *οὐσία* - of two differing contrasted beings; that is, he posits what we would call two different ideations, or abstractions, creating an abstract (idealized) form for one and an abstract (idealized) form for the other.

Some centuries later, Diogenes Laërtius - apparently paraphrasing Heraclitus - wrote in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*:

πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας

ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα (ix. 7)

All by genesis is appropriately apportioned [separated into portions] with beings bound together again by enantiodromia [1].

Which might seem to suggest that a certain mis-understanding of Heraclitus [2], the ideation of Plato and of later philosophers and theologians, was the genesis of abstractions and of this belief that a so-called conflict of opposites can lead to 'truth', and explain the nature of Being and beings.

However, this ideation, this development of abstractions, and this process of a dialectic, led to the philosophical error of the separation of beings from Being so that instead of the revealing that would answer *Quid est Veritas?* there is *ὑβρις* with the numinous authority of an individual *πάθει μάθος* replaced by adherence to some dogmatic dialectical process involving some assumed struggle/conflict. That is, by considering *ἀρχή* as the cause of the abstractions which are opposites and the origin of a dialectic, and which opposites, and which dialectic involving them, are said to manifest the nature of both our being and of Being itself.

This is an error because *Πόλεμος* is neither *kampf* nor conflict, but rather - as the quote from Diogenes Laërtius suggests - what lies behind or beyond *Phainómenon*; that is, non-temporal, non-causal, Being which, though we have a natural tendency to separate into portions (that is, to perceive beings as only beings), beings themselves become revealed as bound together again by us facing up to the expected contest: that is, to our human nature and to knowing, to developing, to using, our faculty of reasoned judgement - *σωφρονεῖν* - to uncover, to reveal, via *λόγος*, the true nature of *Δίκη* and thus restore *ἀρμονίη* [3].

That is, instead of this abstraction of a dialectic there is, as I have suggested elsewhere:

A natural process of Change, of *ἀρχή* which we apprehend as *Φύσις* - as Heraclitus expressed in fragment 112:

σωφρονεῖν ἀρετὴ μέγιστη, καὶ σοφίη ἀληθέα λέγειν καὶ ποιεῖν κατὰ φύσιν ἐπαίοντας.

This suggests that what is most excellent [*ἀρετὴ*] is thoughtful reasoning [*σωφρονεῖν*] - and that such thoughtful reasoning is a process which not only expresses and uncovers meaning, but which is also in accord with, in harmony or in sympathy with, *φύσις* - that is, with our own nature as mortals and with the nature of Being itself. [4]

II - The Error of Polemos as Kampf

In a fragment attributed to Heraclitus [5] *Πόλεμος* is generally regarded as a synonym for either *kampf*, or more generally, for war; with the fragment then considered to mean something such as: strife (or war) is the father of everything. This interpretation is said to compliment another fragment attributed to Heraclitus:

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]. Fragmentum 80.

This is generally considered to mean something abstract such as: war is everywhere and strife is justice and all that is arises and passes away because of strife.

However, I contend that this older understanding of - the accepted rendition of - *Πόλεμος* is a misinterpretation of *Πόλεμος* [6], and that rather than *kampf* (struggle), or a general type of strife, or what we now associate with the term war, *Πόλεμος* implies the acausality (a simultaneity) beyond our causal ideation, and which ideation has separated object from subject, and often abstracted them into seemingly conflicting opposites. Hence my interpretation of Fragmentum 53:

Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.

Polemos our genesis, governing us all to bring forth some gods, some mortal beings with some unfettered yet others kept bound.

Hence also my interpretation of *εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]* as:

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord. [7]

Thus the suggestion is that *Πόλεμος* is not some abstract 'war' or strife

or Kampf, but not only that which is or becomes the genesis of beings from Being, but also that which manifests as *δίκη* and accompanies *ἔρις* because it is the nature of *Πόλεμος* that beings, born because of and by *ἔρις*, can be returned to Being (become bound together - be whole - again).

For it is perhaps interesting that in the recounted tales of Greek mythology attributed to Aesop, and in circulation at the time of Heraclitus, a personified *πόλεμος* (as the *δαίμων* of kindred strife) married a personified *ὑβρις* (as the *δαίμων* of arrogant pride) [8] and that it was a common folk belief that *πόλεμος* accompanied *ὑβρις* - that is, that Polemos followed Hubris around rather than vice versa, causing or bringing *ἔρις*.

As a result of *ἔρις*, there often arises *πάθει μάθος* - that practical and personal knowing, that reasoned understanding which, according to Aeschylus [9] is the new law, the new understanding, given by Zeus to replace the older more religious and dogmatic way of fear and dread, often viewed as *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες* [10]. A new understanding which Aeschylus sought to explain in the *Oresteia*.

III - Being and Empathy

This understanding is basically that of a particular balance, born from *πάθει μάθος* (from the personal knowing of the error, the unbalance, that is *ὑβρις*) and from using reasoned judgement (*σωφρονεῖν*), and both of which make us aware of the true nature of our *φύσις* and of *Φύσις* itself.

In addition, by cultivating and by using our natural faculty of empathy, we can understand both *φύσις* and *Πόλεμος*, and thus apprehend Being as Being, and the nature of beings - and in particular the nature of our being, as mortals. For empathy reveals to us the acausality of Being [11] and thus how the process of abstraction, involving as it does an imposition of causality and separation upon beings (and the ideation implicit on opposites and dialectic), is a covering-up of Being and of *Πόλεμος* and thus involves a mis-understanding of both *Δίκαια* and of *φύσις*.

In place of the numinosity of *ψυχή* - of Life qua being - there is, for the apprehension that is a dialectic of opposites, the hubris of abstractions, and thus a loss of our natural balance, a loss of *ἁρμονία* [12] and *συμπάθεια*.

(Revised 2012)

Notes

[1] I have used a transliteration of the compound Greek word - *ἐναντιοδρομίας* - rather than given a particular translation, since the term enantiodromia in my view suggests the uniqueness of expression of the original, and which original in my view is not adequately, and most certainly not accurately, described by a usual translation such as 'conflict of opposites'. Rather, what is suggested is 'confrontational contest' - that is, by facing up to the expected/planned /inevitable contest.

Interestingly, Carl Jung - who was familiar with the sayings of Heraclitus - used the term enantiodromia to describe the emergence of a trait (of character) to offset another trait and so restore a certain psychological balance within the individual.

[2] Refer to my *Heraclitus - Some Translations and Notes*. (Fifth Edition, 2012)

[3] While *Φύσις* (Physis) has a natural tendency to become covered up (Heraclitus, Fragment 123) it can be uncovered through *λόγος* and *πάθει μάθος*.

[4] In *Empathy and The Immoral Abstraction of Race*

[5] *Πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι, πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς, καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε τοὺς δὲ ἐλευθέρους.*
Fragmentum 53.

[6] See my *Heraclitus - Some Translations and Notes* (Fifth Edition, 2012) where I suggest a new interpretation of Fragmentum 53: *Polemos our genesis, governing us all to bring forth some gods, some mortal beings with some unfettered yet others kept bound.*

[7] Alternative renderings of the fragment are:

a) One should be aware that polemos is pervasive; and discord *δίκη*, and that beings [our being] quite naturally come-into-being through discord

b) One should be aware that polemos pervades; with discord *δίκη*, and that all beings are begotten because of discord.

I have deliberately transliterated (instead of translated) polemos, and left *δίκη*

as *δίκη*.

Depending on context, *δίκη* could be the judgement of an individual (or Judgement personified), or the natural and the necessary balance, or the correct/customary/ancestral way, or what is expected due to custom, or what is considered correct and natural, and so on.

A personified Judgement - the *Δίκη*ν of Hesiod - is the goddess of the natural balance, evident in the ancestral customs, the ways, the way of life, the ethos, of a community, whose judgement, *δίκη*, is "in accord with", has the nature or the character of, what tends to restore such balance after some deed or deeds by an individual or individuals have upset or disrupted that balance. This sense of *δίκη* as one's ancestral customs is evident, for example, in Homer (Odyssey, III, 244).

In the philosophy of *pathei-mathos*, the term *Δίκα* - spelt thus in a modern way with a capital Δ - is sometimes used to intimate a new, a particular and numinous, philosophical principle, and differentiate *Δίκα* from the more general *δίκη*. As a numinous principle, or axiom, *Δίκα* thus suggests what lies beyond and what was the genesis of *δίκη* personified as the goddess, Judgement - the goddess of natural balance, of the ancestral way and ancestral customs.

[8] Correctly understood, a *δαίμων* is not one of the pantheon of major Greek gods - *θεοί* - but rather a lesser type of divinity who might be assigned by those gods to bring good fortune or misfortune to human beings and/or watch over certain human beings and especially particular numinous (sacred) places.

In addition, *Polemos* was originally the *δαίμων* of kindred strife, whether familial, or of one's *πόλις* (one's clan and their places of dwelling). Thus, to describe *Polemos*, as is sometimes done, as the god of conflict (or war), is doubly incorrect.

It is interesting to observe how the term *δαίμων* - with and after Plato, and especially by its use by the early Christian Church - came to be a moral abstraction, used in a bad sense (as 'demon'), and contrasted with another moral abstraction, that of 'angels'. Indeed, this process - this change - with this particular term is a reasonable metaphor for what we may call the manufacture and development of abstractions, and in which development the ontology and theology of an organized monotheistic religion played a not insignificant part.

[9] Agamemnon, 174-183. *qv. Pathei-Mathos as Authority and Way in The Way of Pathei-Mathos.*

[10] Aeschylus (attributed), *Prometheus Bound*, 515-6

[11] γν. *The Nature of Being and of Beings* in *The Way of Pathei-Mathos*.

[12] The numinous is what predisposes us not to commit ὕβρις - that is, what continues or maintains or manifests ἀρμονίη and thus καλλός; the natural balance - sans abstractions - that enables us to know and appreciate, and which uncovers, Φύσις

The Principle of Δίκη

Δίκη is that noble, respectful, balance understood, for example, by Sophocles (among many others) - for instance, Antigone respects the natural balance, the customs and traditions of her own numinous culture, given by the gods, whereas Creon verges towards and finally commits, like Oedipus in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the error of ὕβρις and is thus "taught a lesson" (just like Oedipus) by the gods because, as Aeschylus wrote [1] -

Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν
μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει

In respect of Δίκη, I write - spell - it thus in this modern way with a capital Δ to intimate a new, a particular and numinous, philosophical principle, and differentiate it from the more general δίκη. As a numinous principle, or axiom, Δίκη thus suggests what lies beyond and what was the genesis of δίκη personified as the goddess, Judgement - the goddess of natural balance, of the ancestral way and ancestral customs.

Thus, Δίκη implies the balance, the reasoned judgement, the thoughtful reasoning - σωφρονεῖν - that πάθει μάθος brings and restores, and which accumulated πάθει μάθος of a particular folk or πόλις forms the basis for their ancestral customs. δίκη is therefore, as the numinous principle Δίκη, what may be said to be a particular and a necessary balance between ἀρετή and ὕβρις - between the ὕβρις that often results when the personal, the natural, quest for ἀρετή becomes unbalanced and excessive.

That is, when *ἔρις* (discord) is or becomes *δίκη* - as suggested by Heraclitus in Fragment 80 [2] -

εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἔοντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' ἔριν καὶ χρεώμενα [χρεών]

One should be aware that Polemos pervades, with discord *δίκη*, and that beings are naturally born by discord.

David Myatt
2011

Notes

[1]

Δίκη δὲ τοῖς μὲν παθοῦσιν μαθεῖν ἐπιρρέπει

The goddess, Judgement, favours someone *learning from adversity*.

Aeschylus: Agamemnon, 250-251

[2] Refer to my essay *Some Notes on Πόλεμος and Δίκη in Heraclitus B80*.

cc David Myatt 2012

Fifth Edition



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