Some Notes on Heraclitus Fragment 1

Text

> τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ᾽ ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν ἐοίκασι, 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 εὕδοντες 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 Βίας 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᾽, εὖτ᾽ 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 διαστίξαι 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 γίγνονται": ἄδηλον γὰρ τὸ ἀεί, πρὸς ποτέρῳ δεῖ διαστίξαι. [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. διαιρέων and Φύσις

I take the sense of διαιρέων 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 ἔσσεαι οὐδ᾽ ἀνοήμων,
> εἰ δή τοι σοῦ πατρὸς ἐνέστακται μένος ἠύ,
> 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]:

> γλυκὺ 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.

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Notes

[1] qv. *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 Ἀσωποῦ, 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.

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This above text combines, in a new layout and with one or two slight revisions, my two articles relating to fragment 1 published under the titles *The Poetry of Heraclitus: Part One - Some Notes on λόγος in Fragment B1* and *The Poetry of Heraclitus: Part Two - Some Notes on Physis and Forgetfulness in Fragment B1*.