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# Heraclitus' Rebuke of Polymathy: A Core Element in the Reflectiveness of His Thought

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## Abstract

I offer an examination of a core element in the reflectiveness of Heraclitus' thought, namely, his rebuke of *polymathy*. In doing so, I provide a response to a recent claim that Heraclitus should not be considered to be a philosopher, by attending to his paradigmatically philosophical traits. Regarding Heraclitus' attitude to that naïve form of 'wisdom', i.e., polymathy, I argue that he does not advise avoiding experience of many things, rather, he advises rejecting experience of things as merely many *independent* things *in their manifoldness*, and, instead, to understand their *unity* and thereby to unify our knowledge of them.

## 1 Introduction

In this article, I will offer an examination of a core element in the reflectiveness of Heraclitus' thought, namely, his rebuke of *polymathy*, including a discussion of the issue of the apparent tension between fragments B40<sup>1</sup> and B35 that [22] has been noted in the literature. This examination will show that Heraclitus frames his own thought in terms of his rebuke of this naïve view of wisdom and the world, which came before him. I will argue that Heraclitus does not advise avoiding experience of many things, rather, he advises rejecting experience of things as merely many *independent* things *in their manifoldness*, and, instead, to understand their *unity* and thereby to unify our knowledge of them. In doing this, I will draw out some connections with previous work, especially Alexander Mourelatos' notion (2008) of a *naïve metaphysics of things* to which Heraclitus was reacting by recognising that the world is '*logos-textured*'.

I will begin, in the following section, by addressing the use of the category *philosopher*, in the study of early Greek thought, and by providing a general objection to an argument against categorising the early Greek thinkers as philosophers. I will argue that, if it

1 I refer to the fragments by the standard Diels-Kranz numbering. I rely, in the main, on the Laks & Most 2016 translation for quotation unless otherwise indicated. Their transliterations have been excised.

is not self-evident that Heraclitus is a philosopher, and even if he is not categorised as a philosopher on *historical* grounds, he should nonetheless be considered to be a philosopher on *typological* grounds, given that he reflects upon his own thought and that of others, and that he recognises the novelty of his thought in relation to that of others in his discursive milieu. This debate will provide an occasion in subsequent sections to offer an examination of a core element in the reflectiveness of Heraclitus' thought, namely, his rebuke of a naïve kind of 'wisdom' that he calls '*polymathy*', much learning. This will show, I think, not only that Heraclitus is reflective upon his own thought, but also that he frames his thought through his rebuke of the views of others and that there is thereby a close connection between his rebuke of polymathy and the reflectiveness of his thought.

## 2 ...Other men are unaware of all they do when they are awake... (B1)

The mainstream view regarding Heraclitus is that it is "self-evident that he was a philosopher" (Hülsz 2013a, 281). Indeed, if one thinks this, one may also think that Heraclitus may act as a paradigmatic exemplar of a philosopher. That is, that his traits, the grounds upon which we take him to be a philosopher, could potentially be taken to be identifying characteristics of the category of philosopher more broadly. Indeed, in this article I will discuss some of these traits, especially with regard to Heraclitus' rebuke of a naïve form of 'wisdom', *polymathy*. However, despite such mainstream views, it is nonetheless sometimes argued, that Heraclitus should not be considered to be a philosopher and, hence, it is important to address such arguments in a non-question-begging manner. [23]

This is a topic of debate in the literature that has received attention in recent years, and should not be taken to be entirely otiose if one is concerned about the details of the emergence of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, as Enrique Hülsz (2013a, 281) said: "Almost all interpreters of Heraclitus have always had a ready answer to the question: 'What was Heraclitus?'" In taking a stance upon the issues regarding the emergence of philosophy one will of necessity take concomitant stances regarding who is a philosopher and who is not, and *vice versa*. For example, in a recent book, Aryeh Finkelberg (2017) has outlined his theory that the early Greek thinkers were part of what he calls the 'Thaletan tradition' that had its own distinct and non-philosophical 'Thaletan conceptual scheme',<sup>3</sup> and argues for the concomitant stance that these thinkers should not, in any event, be categorised as philosophers and scientists:

Needless to say it was not the early thinkers' aim to found philosophy and science; their work, then, had another intent, hence another meaning. The categorization of these thinkers as philosophers and scientists is proleptic— casting an eye to the significance their theories acquired in light of future intellectual developments.

FINKELBERG 2017, 12

Finkelberg argues further that such thinkers' purposes should instead be explained on their own terms:

2 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

3 Further, it would seem to follow, Finkelberg's book is, by its own lights, not a book entirely about philosophy.

Historical explanation of human actions renders them intelligible by referring to their typical cause, namely the agents' purpose which, then, must be formulated in a way meaningful to the agents themselves, that is, in terms in which they themselves would explain their doings. For that reason 'philosophy' must not be used as an explanatory paradigm for early thought, and the label 'philosophers' must be withheld from historical study as contravening the availability principle. Whether the theories of the early thinkers may—or should—be regarded as philosophical on typological grounds is a different question [...]

FINKELBERG 2017, 16

So, he argues, 'philosophy' should not be used as a *historical category* or *explanatory paradigm* for the historical events of early Greek thought, because [24] the thinkers involved did not think of themselves as being so categorised. However, he admits that this does not resolve the question entirely, as it does not rule out the possibility that the early thinkers should be regarded as philosophical on typological grounds. A similar view was held by Enrique Hülsz:

[...] Heraclitus (and, for that matter, all other Presocratics) probably did not use the words "philosophy," "philosopher," or "philosophize," and so could not think of himself or of his own activity as a thinker in these terms.

HÜLSZ 2013A, 281

This, I think, is a reasonable approach to take; we should aim to avoid reading anything into the text that does not belong there or is not *available* in some way to its author and their then readers. However, this reasoning, of course, does not extend to an argument for a general prohibition on using 'philosophy' as a category for early Greek thought.

The mere fact that some person or group does not or could not think of themselves as partaking in a specific kind of practice, does not entail that they are not partaking in that practice. For illustration, consider the following somewhat more mundane example: Suppose that it is discovered that a particular ancient tribe played a particular kind of game on the beach, call it 'Mancala', using stones and pits into which to place them. We would categorise this as a 'board-game'. However, the players did not categorise it in this way at all, knowing nothing of the general mathematical system of which the game is part, its relationships with other games of a similar kind, fixed or portable boards on which the games might be played, etc. All that they knew was *that particular game*, which is played at the beach in a certain way (perhaps they call it 'Mancala' too). If it were asked 'What was the first board-game ever played?', and the answer of 'Mancala' were rejected on the grounds that its original players did not think of it as a 'board-game', this would undoubtedly be seen as a highly suspect and pernicious response, even if one were to explain one's principled objection on the basis of the principle of availability. It would be better to say that they *did* play a board-game, but that of course they did not *think* of it in quite the same way that we do. This is an important fact in itself, which relies on a basis of comparison that is only available to someone who accepts that the players played a board-game.

While respecting principles such as *availability*, we should also recognise that it is possible to interpret such principles so inflexibly as to make a nonsense of them, that is, by making historical situations incomprehensible to *us*, [25] and, indeed, an entire tradition. So,

perhaps we should categorise early Greek thought as being nonetheless philosophical, on typological grounds.

However, there are those who would resist even this. For example, when picking up this question again, Finkelberg attempts to respond to this very objection “that whatever their intended meaning, the doctrines of the early thinkers were essentially philosophical” (Finkelberg 2017, 314). That is, he argues against categorising early Greek thought as philosophical on typological grounds. He says that “To decide this we need not enter into the vexed question of what philosophy is.” (ibid.), and instead relies upon what he takes to be an uncontroversial observation, previously made by Robin G. Collingwood, that “Philosophy is reflective. The philosophizing mind ... always, while thinking about any object, thinks also about its own thought about that object. Philosophy may thus be called thought of the second degree” (ibid.).<sup>4</sup> Finkelberg then expands upon this minimal characterisation of philosophy as being a mode of reflective thinking, as follows:

That is, philosophical activity involves raising questions about [discursive] strategies; mere contemplation of philosophical questions (i.e. questions which used to be or would subsequently be raised by philosophers) does not qualify as philosophy.

The primary indication of the reflectiveness of thought is methodological consciousness, and this is conspicuously lacking in the early thinkers. [...] Some early thinkers addressed epistemic questions but never conceptualized them as, therefore failed to thematize them into, a distinct subject of enquiry. [...] there is no Presocratic instance of critical appraisal of an argument or a theory, or of a self-criticism. [...] But, even if we admit that the early thinkers occasionally raised second-order questions, this will not suffice for qualifying their theories as philosophical, for philosophical discourse is methodically, not occasionally, reflective.

FINKELBERG 2017, 314–315<sup>5</sup>

[26] This kind of second-order thought, he thinks, is absent from the early Greeks’ *methodology* even if it is not absent *simpliciter*. That is, there are apparently isolated occasions, but he does not deem them to be verily ‘methodological’. The claim here is that these occurrences are not sufficient for showing that they arose from a ‘methodological consciousness’ and thereby reflectiveness, over and above the many examples of reflective thought and their relations to each other.

In the spirit of charity, let us grant the above minimal characterisation of philosophy for the moment, and ask whether Heraclitus reflects upon his own, Heraclitus’, methodology. It is clear that such reflectiveness is often mentioned in commentaries upon Heraclitus. Indeed, some scholars have pointed out that Heraclitus has various levels to his discourse. This is especially apparent in literature regarding the *unity of opposites* and *logos*, because of a sort

4 The ellipsis is Finkelberg’s. He quotes from the introduction of *The Idea of History* (Collingwood 1994).

5 It is ironic that ‘epistemic’ is used here as an example category of questions, for these become thematised into a *distinct* subject of inquiry, i.e., epistemology, *much* later than other categories, and the word and its cognates are used quite late. Jan Woleński (2004, 3) points out that: “the terms which now denote this field, namely ‘epistemology’ and ‘theory of knowledge’, appeared not very long ago, later than terms indicating metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics or even ontology. As late as in the 17th century there was no single word referring to epistemology.” Indeed, as he goes on to say, it is not until 1854 that the word ‘epistemology’ is first used by James E. Ferrier in his work *Institutes of Metaphysics*.

of self-referentiality or self-reflexivity inherent to these principles.<sup>6</sup> So, it appears that it has been widely recognised that Heraclitus is reflective upon his own methodology, and that this reflection involves attending to discursive patterns and principles. [27]

Indeed, it is a central focus of this article to show that it is part of Heraclitus' methodology that he is also reflective upon the methodology of others, especially in his rejection of their conflation of polymathy with *noos*, and that Heraclitus' thought involves presenting his methodological views through his criticism of those of others. What Finkelberg proposes then is somewhat of a tall order, when he requires that we show that Heraclitus' thought was reflective, over and above the *actual* occasions of reflection that are scattered in fragmentary evidence. In proposing this he takes what is, by his own admission, merely a "primary indication" of reflectiveness to be *necessary* for reflectiveness, which is to go beyond reflectiveness as a minimal characterisation as was suggested by Collingwood.

We should also ask what would be enough to meet this criterion of reflectiveness and whether the notions of reflectiveness or 'methodological consciousness' that are being employed stand outside this tradition, or whether they are not also potentially open to the charge of anachronism or projection. That is, how should reflectiveness be recognised in *this* context? In claiming that the early Greek thinkers were not reflective, if one relies on judging the fragments by a later standard of reflectiveness e.g., an explicit statement of 'methodological consciousness' over and above the many occasions of reflectiveness, this would be improper to judging contexts in which such consciousness is not routinely made explicit or is yet to be made explicit. That is, it would be a way of begging the question in such contexts.

The criterion leaves open the possibility that there are thinkers who address philosophical questions unreflectively, knowing not exactly what they do although they do it wakefully nonetheless. However, this seems too strong. How are we to be sure that we know that philosophers *today* know what they are doing in this sense? This is an issue that requires continuous historico-philosophical reflection. Alternatively, one might hold what Hülsz reported as being the mainstream view, that it is "self-evident" that Heraclitus was a

6 Here are some prominent examples: first, as M.M. McCabe pointed out: "[...] his discourse occurs both at the object level (talking about the world, the rivers, the roads, and the possets) and at the higher, theoretical level. Further, it is apparent that he supposes that the talk corresponds directly to the way things are—there is no hint that what we say could be detached from the facts of the matter. So there is continuity between the objects, talk about the objects, the general principles of that talk, and the talk about the general principles. But this means that the general principles are themselves subject to the general principles of discourse—indeed they are *self-referential*." (Mackenzie 1988, 18)

Edward Hussey (1999, 93) explains similarly that Heraclitus generalises upon particular examples of his own, and attempts to state their pattern reflectively before applying it more widely: "Unity-in-opposites appears in Heraclitus in three distinct ways: (1) He presents, in suitably plain language, mostly without comment, *examples* of the pattern taken from everyday experience; (2) he *generalises* from these examples, in statements where the language verges on the abstract, seemingly in an attempt to state the pattern in itself; and (3) he *applies* the pattern in the construction of theories, in particular to cosmology and to the theory of the soul" (references to article sections removed).

Hülsz (2013a, 284) has also pointed out that self-awareness and self-reflexivity are fundamental to Heraclitus' thought: "Heraclitus' stance contrasts with the oblivious disposition of 'other men,' who are likened to sleepers (thus projecting back the idea of awareness as a fundamental trait in Heraclitus' own philosophical attitude). Because of this self-awareness, a certain self-reflexivity goes well with λόγος from the very start."

More recently, Shaul Tor (2017, 31) has pointed out that, along with "inquiry into nature" Heraclitus engages in "[...] second-order reflection on what sort of speculative approach such an inquiry must involve [...]"

philosopher (2013a, 281), and that we do not in fact need *any* such criterion.<sup>7</sup> However, for the purposes of the current dialectic, although we have shown that Finkelberg's criterion is problematic in that it is too strong, we have not shown that *every* such minimal characterisation is problematic. Hence, in a spirit of charity we must suggest a minimal characterisation that attempts to avoid the problems mentioned above. Indeed, even if one considers Heraclitus to be a paradigmatic exemplar of a philosopher, one should nevertheless ask in virtue of which traits this should be judged, i.e., which traits are paradigmatically philosophical. I suggest that such a minimal characterisation should have [28] the result that philosophy includes the activity of thinkers who address philosophical questions, but not so unreflectively that they fail to realise even that what they are doing is distinctive in relation to the context of their discursive milieu. That is, they need not be reflective in the stronger sense insisted upon by Finkelberg (2017) in his taking a mere indicator to be a necessary condition. Further, demanding evidence of a "critical appraisal of an argument or a theory" as Finkelberg does, is to become insensitive to the context. Instead, I take as indicators the very practices that are commonly pointed to by commentators as being philosophical and reflective in Heraclitus, some of which we noted earlier; i.e., his attention to discursive patterns and principles. Further, I intend to emphasise, and show later in this article, that it is also part of his methodology that he is reflective upon and responsive to the views of others in his discursive milieu.

To be considered to be the first in some field of study, one does not need to have conceived of an area of academia deriving from one's work. All one need have done is to have performed an activity that is recognisably typical of the field, and to have realised the novelty of what one has done in particular, but not necessarily all of its distinctive features and consequences. Similarly, to be a player of the first board-game I need not know, proleptically, that I am playing a 'board-game', which is related to other such games, etc., merely that my practice in playing the game is distinctive in comparison with other practices in the milieu, e.g., playing a beach sport, fishing, making salt, etc. Indeed, I here take again Finkelberg's (2017, 12) earlier advice that such "proleptic" attitudes to the foresight of early thinkers are to be avoided. That is, we should not require that thinkers be reflective by some later standard that is, perhaps, informed by developments upon their own work.

In this section, I have argued that although the early Greek thinkers including Heraclitus should not be categorised as philosophers on historical grounds, that is, that they should not be called 'philosopher' on account of thinking of themselves under this category, for they probably did not, Heraclitus nonetheless *should* be categorised as a philosopher on typological grounds, minimally construed. That is, as one who contemplated philosophical questions, "i.e. questions which used to be or would subsequently be raised by philosophers" (Finkelberg 2017, 314), and was reflective upon their own thought to the extent that they realised that what they are doing is distinctive and novel in relation to the context of their discursive milieu. Granting, that is, for the purposes of the current dialectic, that it is not to be taken as self-evident that Heraclitus is a philosopher; for to do so would be to provide a question begging response to someone who provides an argument for the claim that Heraclitus is not a philosopher. If, instead, one already takes Heraclitus to be paradigmatically [29] philosophical, the following sections, I think, nonetheless present good reasons in favour of this claim. As we will see in the next sections, Heraclitus is reflective in

7 I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

that he recognises his own thought as being distinctive and novel in relation to his discursive milieu, and he uses a number of literary devices in order to make this obvious to the reader.

### 3 Don't listen to me, listen to the *logos* (B50)

Heraclitus is known for his enigmatic style, which employs paradox, word-play of various kinds, homographic (B48) and homophonic (e.g., B114) puns, syntactic and semantic ambiguities (e.g. B1), etc., and it is often thought that such devices contribute something of substance to his message.<sup>8</sup> Authors who write enigmatically implicitly intend for their readers to search for the meanings of their compositions. This, I think, is also the case for Heraclitus, which we become aware of immediately upon beginning to read his book.

Heraclitus puts forward a more novel notion of *logos*, one that would have seemed odd to anyone familiar with the contemporary use of the term *logos* to refer to the particular account that is being expounded, for example, at the beginning of a work by a Milesian inquirer (Kahn 1979, 96–100). This distinction is first broached in the first sentence of B1, usually taken to be at or near the beginning of his book. Here he first presents his more novel notion of *logos* as having some unusual qualities that set it apart from the former notion:

And of this account that is—always—humans are uncomprehending, both before they hear it and once they have first heard it.

D1 [B1], FIRST SENTENCE, TRANS. LAKS & MOST

This *logos* is unusual in that it is *always*, and that humans are *always* uncomprehending of it (B1). The word “always” (ἀεί) appears only once in the Greek, however, most scholars now accept, following Kahn’s principle of *linguistic density* (Kahn 1979, 89), that it can be construed *both* with what comes before and after.<sup>9</sup> Heraclitus tells us that humans are always uncomprehending of the *logos*. Even while they *have not heard it*, and even when they get around to [30] hearing it for the first time (B1), they resemble the deaf due to their incomprehension; they are present and hear it but might as well have been absent for all they get out of it (B34), perhaps also judged by what they say.

8 Cf. Leshner 1994, 13, who also quotes from Kahn 1979, 124.

9 Prior to Kahn’s use of this principle, scholars opted for one reading or the other of the first line of B1. For Kahn’s argument regarding ‘always’ in B1, see his 1979, 93–95. Hülsz (2013a, 286) agreed that “The very first sentence is syntactically ambivalent, in a way that permits or even demands that both possible constructions are kept.” For an example of the application of Kahn’s principle of *linguistic density* to other fragments, see Graham 2015.

The linguistic density in B1 is made possible by a syntactic ambiguity, which was noted and censured by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1407b11–18). A more recent denier of the principle is Finkelberg, who thinks that it relies on a case of “special pleading” that treats Heraclitus’ book as one that was “quite unlike all other books” of the time by being intended for close study by readers rather than being for hearers (Finkelberg 2017, 37–38). However, Finkelberg here does not address fragment B48: “The name of the bow (cf. *biós*) is life (*bíos*), but its work is death” (Laks & Most 2016, 163: D53[B48]). This fragment contains a *homographic* pun on an epic name for the bow, ‘ΒΙΟΣ’. Given that the script lacked diacritic marks, this word shared its spelling with the word for ‘life’. The reader’s attention is drawn to this pun, if it had not already been so drawn, directly upon reading the contrasting term ‘death’ at the end of the fragment. Finkelberg (2017, 214, n. 21) happens to highlight this pun later in his book, but there is no argument given there for why this *homographic* pun should be treated as being for hearers rather than readers, nor could there be. As Dilcher (1995, 132, n. 14) recognised, the pun in B48 is “the only evident sign that Heraclitus actually composed his book in writing and in order to be read”. It should also be recognised that there is clearly no contradiction between reading and being heard reading; so, it is additionally available to the reader/hearer to appreciate *homophonic* puns and other phonic effects nevertheless.

At first glance it might seem to be no fault of mine that I do not comprehend something that I have not yet heard; for how could one be expected to comprehend it? Perhaps the reason is that the *logos* need not be heard to be recognised. Indeed, a *logos* that is *always*, is not something that could exist merely as the words of a single speaker or author, for they are always changing. It must be distinct from *logoi* conceived in this way or, perhaps, have a distinct existence from such *logoi*.

Heraclitus gives this eternal *logos* an important role, at least in that all things come about in accord with it (B1). Much has been said about this role, and interpreters have offered many differing opinions pertaining to whether the *logos* is a notion that is objective, e.g., by having an existence of its own, or subjective, e.g., as words or thoughts, or in some way between the two and involving both.<sup>10</sup> What is clear is that this novel notion of *logos* is something that Heraclitus believes is a novel development regarding considerations of *logoi* in his discursive milieu, and he is at pains to point this out to us in the starkest of formulations. [31]

B50 is often taken to be a crucial fragment, due to its distinction between 'listening to me' and 'listening to the *logos*', and its concluding formula: one – all-things (*hen panta einai*).<sup>11</sup>

After you have listened not to me but to the account, it is wise to recognize that all things are one.

D46 [B50], TRANS. LAKS & MOST

Here Heraclitus directs the reader to listen not to *him*, i.e., to his particular words or their content, but to the *logos*. At least on first reading, this could not mean something like 'Don't take my word for it, listen to *The (true) Logos*'.<sup>12</sup> Such a reading would assume in advance, on behalf of the ancient reader, a specific grasp of Heraclitus' intended novel notion of *logos* as being some higher authority. Instead, the beginning of the message received would have been more akin to the somewhat paradoxical 'Don't listen to me!', which should strike the reader of any publication as unusual in that it is apparently self-defeating. This, perhaps, would not rise to be called an instance of "self-criticism" as Finkelberg (2017, 315) had insisted was absent from the thought of the Presocratics. However, if we properly understand the context, it should be seen as at least being self-reflective in that Heraclitus is saying that something will be better recognised if one does not listen to him. It is entirely unclear how one could say such a thing if one had not reflected upon oneself or one's own capabilities. Heraclitus employs this device to reinforce the, equally surprising, distinction between the usual notion of *logos* and a more novel notion of *logos* that is more difficult to understand, which he presents, for example, in B1. He *could* have coined a new word, but instead chose to explain this notion as a development upon another that was already well known in his milieu and with which it is intimately connected. This is not an unfamiliar trait among philosophers, no less today.

This trait, of developing one's own thought upon prior conceptions, is one that, I think, shows that Heraclitus was reflective upon his own thought and, indeed, recognised its novelty in relation to the context of his discursive milieu. That is, Heraclitus could not have

10 For a recent comprehensive overview of *logos* in Heraclitus, see Johnstone 2014.

11 Dilcher (1995, 101) suggests that: "This formula indicates what the *logos* amounts to: 'one – all things', a simple identity in which neither side is given prevalence. We cannot even tell which of the two is meant to be the subject and which the predicate – in their identity it certainly works both ways round".

12 I am grateful to Philipp Steinkrüger for suggesting this potential reading.

performed such a development without reflecting upon his own use of the everyday notion of *logos* and, [32] indeed, reflecting upon the attitudes of his readers in leading their expectations in this regard. Heraclitus intends us not merely to search for *his* hidden meaning, but to recognise or *speak in accord* (*homologeîn*) with what it relies upon (B50), by listening to the *logos* which is common to all but hidden (B2), such that we recognise that one – all-things.

In the following sections, I will examine Heraclitus' rebuke of a naïve kind of 'wisdom' that he calls '*polymathy*', much learning. This will show, I think, not only that Heraclitus is reflective upon his own thought, but also that he frames his thought through his rebuke of the views of others and that there is thereby a close connection between his rebuke of polymathy and the reflectiveness of his thought. Let us now turn to a consideration of this naïve kind of 'wisdom' that Heraclitus rejects, i.e., polymathy, and how he is said to have rejected it.

#### 4 Polymathy does not teach *Noos* (B40)

Heraclitus' notion of wisdom, the best epistemic state, and the state of the soul which leads to it, understanding (*noos*), which involves relying on the *logos*, which is common, must be somewhat out of the ordinary given the nature of what is sought. B40 is especially important because in it he presents what he takes to be insufficient for understanding and wisdom, by way of a key term, "polymathy" (πολυμαθίη), apparently coined by him (Kahn 1979, 37; Zhmud 2017, 172), perhaps in imitation of other πολυ- forms in epic language (cf. Snell 1953, 18).

Much learning does not teach intelligence: for otherwise it would have taught it to Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again to Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

D20 [B40], TRANS. LAKS & MOST

Mentioned for criticism are four figures who are polymaths in the sense that they have much learning; some of whom are nearby contemporaries of Heraclitus while others are more distant poets who still loom large.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that Heraclitus is here employing as part of his methodology what could be called nascent history of philosophy. That is, it is inherent to the manner in [33] which he explains his view, regarding the insufficiency of polymathy for understanding, that he explains it in terms of a rejection of the views of others who are all said to know much, or to be polymaths. He achieves this by using as a device the counterfactual attainment of understanding by the four polymaths whom he singles out. If polymathy could have taught understanding, then it would have taught those who know most. However, since it did not teach them understanding, it could not have done so (B40). As such, Heraclitus' rejection of polymathy is not a narrow polemic against a certain figure or their views, rather, it is the rejection of a view that has captivated many people, especially those who are apparently the most knowledgeable. These figures are held up as exemplars of a certain way of viewing the world and our knowledge of it, of which Heraclitus disapproves. This might not rise to being called an "instance of critical appraisal of an argument or a

13 Perhaps Homer could have been included in the list also. In B104, those who believe the poets are said not to have *noos*, and he has a fragment to himself, B56, in which he is said to be "wiser than all the other Greeks", but was fooled by boys (Laks & Most 2016, 149: D22 [B56]). This great 'wisdom' is likely to be of a merely extensive kind, i.e., *polymathy*.

theory” as Finkelberg (2017, 315) had insisted was absent from the thought of the Presocratics, but it does, I believe, nonetheless show that Heraclitus was a methodologically reflective thinker who reflected carefully upon his own views and methodology in relation to the views and methodologies of others, if, that is, we are sufficiently sensitive to the context.

Elsewhere, Heraclitus expands upon his criticism of (at least) two of these figures separately, in B129 (Pythagoras) and B57 (Hesiod). This leaves open the possibility that, although they are all nonetheless tarred with the same brush, a treatment of each figure might bring out a different aspect, differently assessed, of their naïve kind of ‘wisdom’, polymathy, or at least show that there are a number of ways in which to characterise it. In B129, Heraclitus uses the same term in criticising Pythagoras as was used in B40.

Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, devoted himself to investigation more than all other men, and after he had made a selection of these writings [scil. probably: the writings of other people] he devised his own wisdom: much learning, evil artifice.

D26 [B129], TRANS. LAKS & MOST<sup>14</sup>

As Carl Huffman (2008, 42–43) explained, Pythagoras is here introduced in a formal manner, by including his patronym, perhaps for ironic effect. That is, the reader might then expect a claim to honour and truth but, instead, there comes a denunciation in the strongest terms, another typical Heraclitean reversal employed to shock the reader. Indeed, this is structurally similar to B50 where we also find a reversal of the expectation of truth on Heraclitus part in [34] that he enjoins us not to listen to him but to the *logos*. What Heraclitus advises in B129 is that one must avoid deafening oneself with *logoi* reporting the “investigation” or “inquiry” (ἱστορίην) of others and, in his view, constructing an oxymoronic “wisdom of one’s own” (ἑαυτοῦ σοφίην) (given that the *logos* is common, *xunon*, cf. B2), “much learning” (πολυμαθίην), an “evil artifice” or “malpractice” (κακοτεχνίην) for which he rebukes Pythagoras.

In B35 we have, perhaps, the earliest reported usage of the word ‘philosopher’, i.e., φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας (‘Men who love wisdom’). The fragment says that such people, or perhaps ‘men’ generally, must be inquirers into or, rather, have experience of, many things. However, some scholars take it to be uncertain as to whether the wording, preserved by Clement of Alexandria, is authentic, and what Heraclitus’ attitude to this notion should be taken to be.<sup>15</sup>

For according to Heraclitus, men who love wisdom must be investigators into very many things.

14 The quoted remark in square brackets is that of Laks & Most.

15 Kahn (1979, 105) noted that “Clement is generally one of our best sources for literal citations”. However, in their recent edition of Heraclitus’ fragments, Laks & Most (2016, 156–157) retain merely a single word of this fragment as original to Heraclitus, i.e., “investigators” (ἱστορας), thereby returning to an approach that was advised one hundred years earlier by Karl Reinhardt, which Marcovich (1967, 27) later called “exaggerated and improbable”; the latter nonetheless rejects φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας (‘men who love wisdom’) in favour of simply ‘men’, and is followed in this by others, e.g., Barnes (1982, 116), and Robinson (1987, 29, 104) with merely ‘enquirers’. Huffman (2008, 32, n. 32) follows Kahn (1979, 105) “in assigning all wording to Heraclitus”. However, he explains that “Most historians of ancient philosophy translate ἱστωρ as ‘enquirer’ [...] but I cannot find a parallel for such a translation.” Instead, Huffman notes the connection with being skilled, perhaps like a skilled arbiter, and translates ‘having knowledge’. Also cf. Finkelberg (2017, 200, n. 39) who agrees that: “ἱστωρ means ‘knowing, learned, skilled’; ‘enquirer’, as some scholars render the word, is not among its known senses”.

B35 is sometimes thought to be in tension with B40, in which we are told that polymathy, that is, much learning or the learning of many things, does not teach understanding or wisdom. Interpreters have taken a number of differing views on this apparent tension. In order to avoid becoming too entangled in the literature on this matter, I distinguish two main kinds of approach, which I will refer to here as the *compatibilist* and *incompatibilist* approaches. This will also turn out to be useful for elucidating my own view in that I shall then set my view against both and show how it can be seen to be sensitive and responsive to the main concerns of each. [35]

In recent literature on this matter the standard *compatibilist* approach has it that Heraclitus believes that extensive experience of a great many things (*eu mala pollōn historas*), is necessary (B35) but not sufficient for understanding (B40).<sup>16</sup> As such, Heraclitus rebukes others for mistaking polymathy as sufficient for understanding, but does *not* say that one should avoid the accumulation of experience.<sup>17</sup> That is, Heraclitus did not mean to rule out what is witnessed with eyes and ears, which he says that he prefers (B55), rather he aimed to show that this would not be enough on its own. If the wording of B35 is genuine, then subscribers of this compatibilist approach may wish to claim that Heraclitus admires such ‘philosophers’ and their knowledge of many things (cf. Kahn 1979, 105). More generally though, Heraclitus is not against men having knowledge and experience, but merely against treating the naïve kind of ‘wisdom’, i.e., polymathy, arising directly from it, as understanding or [36] wisdom proper. Indeed, one must dig a lot of earth if one is to find what one seeks, symbolically, gold (B22), which tends to be hidden (B123) in the earth.

The other main kind of approach that has been put forward in the literature regarding the tension noted above and the status of *polymathiē* and *historiē*, is an *incompatibilist* one. On this approach, Heraclitus is taken to have thought that such kinds of ‘wisdom’ and inquiry are

16 Leshner (1994, 15) called this the “consensus” approach and mentions as examples: Kirk 1954, 61 (B35 is not one of Kirk’s ‘cosmic’ fragments, but is nonetheless relied upon at 238 & 395); Marcovich 1967, 28; Hussey 1972, 37; Kahn 1979, 108 (quoted in n. 17 below); Barnes 1979, 147–149; Kirk, Raven & Schofield 1983, 187 (I am uncertain why Leshner lists this page. B35 is mentioned on 218); Robinson 1987, 182 (There is a better representation of the view on 106–107); Leshner adds that Guthrie (1962, 417, 429–430) “sought to straddle the fence” between the two views. Ten years later, Granger (2004, 248) claimed that it was still the case that “classical scholars commonly believe” in the compatibilist view, which he argues against. Granger adds Marcovich 1967, 59 to the list but does not mention any more recent examples of the view.

I regard Barnes as somewhat of an outlier on the list, due to his analytical view of Heraclitus as a proto-early modern empiricist or ‘sensationalist’ in whose epistemological tradition Locke falls; I reference Barnes’ second edition (1982, 46, 115–116). Barnes takes the rebuke to be against not the *poly-* but the *-mathy*, as he sees it, the learning from others. This is certainly an aspect, but may be merely a derivative one.

The compatibilist view is, I believe, still the consensus. We may further add to Leshner’s list above: von Fritz 1945, 233–234; Snell 1953, 144–145 (cf. n. 27 below); Prier 1976, 69–71; Curd 1991, 531, 536; Graham 2010, 188; McKirahan 2010, 134; Curd 2011, 30–31; Thom 2013, 90–91. Thom provides an incorrect page number for Barnes’ second edition; Zhmud 2017, 175; Cankaya 2017, 306 (follows Curd 1991); Stekeler-Weithofer 2017, 529; Finkelberg 2017, 200, n. 40. Finkelberg here notes also Frede (1996, 2–3), cf. also Finkelberg, 206 and 34, n. 66 where he says that “B 35 turns to be ironic if linked to B 40 and B 129, and a positive requirement if associated with B 55, B 107, and B 123” implying that its “meaning is indefinite and therefore was context-dependent”.

17 Charles Kahn’s (1979, 108) view is a good representative of the compatibilist approach: “There is no inconsistency between this depreciation of ‘learning many things’ and the claim in [B22, B35, B123] that a great deal of knowledge and experience is required in the pursuit of wisdom. Heraclitus does not say that the *polymathiē* is a waste of time, only that it is not enough: that the mere accumulation of information will not yield understanding, unless it is accompanied by some fundamental insight.”

superfluous for, or incompatible with, understanding and wisdom proper. Interpreters taking this view often take B35 as being at least derogatory towards the inquiry of such ‘philosophers’, thus claiming it to be an ironic attack upon someone else’s practice.<sup>18</sup> However, it seems to me likely that if the term were genuinely Heraclitean and recognised to be of any importance, we would be in possession of a number of quoted instances of it, rather than merely a single doubtful one. On balance then, I am inclined, along with those who take a compatibilist approach, to read B35 straightforwardly and non-ironically. Since we may recognise an epistemic context even without the word *philosophos*, one does not lose much if any of Heraclitus’ substantive advice even when reading the fragment as being about [37] men more generally requiring experience of a great many things, and, indeed, some interpreters have settled upon this less committal reading.<sup>19</sup>

However, there are those, such as Roman Dilcher, who have approached the problem instead by expunging it entirely, that is, by suppressing B35, when he responded to the compatibilist position as follows:

The knowledge of many things does not further the endeavour to become self-conscious. Concentrating on external things, it always remains at the surface and distracts from achieving that which alone is important: to acquire a sound mind. This fragment [B40] does not merely state the common experience that sheer learning does not yet entail an understanding of the things learnt. Whether or not the learning is done properly, it is focussed on something which is not worthwhile paying attention to - since it necessarily is only πολλά [‘many’]. Πολυμαθίη [‘polymathy’] is an altogether wrong path.

DILCHER 1995, 22

18 Cornford (1957, 186, n. 3) called it an “ironical sneer at polymaths”. Guthrie (1962, 417) called it “heavily ironical”, and thus he “sought to straddle the fence” on this issue (Leshner 1994, 15, n. 29; see n. 16 above). Herbert Granger (2004, 250) is often cited as being the main proponent of the incompatibilist view in recent literature. For example, he says: “[...] if *historiê* is discredited, it would discredit as well those ‘philosophical men’ who are obliged to be ‘inquirers’ into many things. Yet this is exactly what we should expect, since the ancient world honors Pythagoras with the coinage of ‘philosopher’ and with being the first to give himself this title (D.L. 1.12, Cic. Tuse. 5.8–9). Heraclitus is ridiculing the neologism, and he leaves the word to those parvenus like Pythagoras who pursue ‘inquiry.’”

However, as Carl Huffman (2008, 32, n. 32) points out, “[...] it is hard to know whether Heraclitus is mocking the new term φιλοσοφος [...], which a questionable later tradition said Pythagoras coined, or adopting it himself”. Further, the words φιλοσόφους ἄνδρας are disputed (cf. n. 15 above). For example, Hülsz (2013b, 188, n. 1) attributed these words to Clement of Alexandria and explained that: “If these words were truly from Heraclitus, we would be facing the earliest use recorded in Greek, and a *hapax legomenon* in the pre-Socratic tradition. The story in Diogenes Laertius (I, 12; VIII, 8 from Heraclides Ponticus) that Pythagoras called himself φιλόσοφος is more likely an elaboration built on Plato (cf. *Phaedrus* 278d) than a historically reliable anecdote.” That is, Granger’s view relies both upon this *hapax legomenon* being genuine and on accepting the reports by Diogenes Laertius that Pythagoras was first to be called ‘philosopher’.

For a recent defence of the word *philosophos*, see Moore 2020, ch. 2, esp. 37–45, including a version of the incompatibilist view in which “being a *póllon histôr* basically means being *polumathês*” (40). This is, I think, unnecessarily strong when joined with his thesis regarding Heraclitus’ positive epistemology involving “a qualitative [...] shift in insight [...] that he treats in analogy to waking up” (45). Hence, much of what I say in response to Dilcher’s view below is relevant here also, except insofar as I am in agreement with Moore on aspects of Heraclitus’ positive view.

19 See n. 15 above.

Such an interpretation is strongly weighted towards an extreme internalism in which learning of external things is deprecated.<sup>20</sup> However, when he addresses B107 (barbarian souls), he takes it to say:

Even the most basic contact with reality through the sense-organs, let alone true insight, is dependent on the soul. Eyes and ears do not simply perceive a factual reality which the mind can then interpret in different ways. Perception itself will not be penetrating and acute if the soul is not. It is the soul which directs and steers the body, the physical movements (as demonstrated by the drunkard) [B117] as well as the senses.

DILCHER 1995, 80

Dilcher is not just denying the compatibilist view, he is claiming that Heraclitus thought that one must acquire sound mind in order to be able to perceive the world in a penetrating and acute mode. It is unclear what Dilcher envisages as being sufficient 'directing and steering' to achieve this. Excluding perception from the development of wisdom in this way is not particularly convincing. [38] Imputing a denial or depreciation of perception to an ancient thinker requires exceptional evidence, for example, its being the conclusion of a sound philosophical argument or, at least, one intended to be.

Dilcher (1995, 22), I think, is correct to recognise the importance of the one-many contrast in Heraclitus' critique of polymathy, which he notes throughout his book.<sup>21</sup> However, that polymathy "is an altogether wrong path", is too extreme a position for Heraclitus to have held.<sup>22</sup> Heraclitus is not advising us to turn away from external experience and in some way to acquire a sound mind *a priori*, as it were, rather, he is advising us to recognise something hidden in plain sight. What we must recognise is the relation between one and all-things. To recognise the unity of things, we certainly must turn away from the many things *in their manifoldness*, but this does not entail that we must turn away from studying those things. Rather, as we will see in the next section, we must realise that treating them as merely independent things leads to our knowledge of them being a mere aggregate of experiences. Thus, although I am sensitive to the standard compatibilist view, that experience of a great many things is necessary but not sufficient for understanding and wisdom, I take it that it is strictly not experience of a great many things *in their manifoldness* that is necessary. For Heraclitus, such experience is, indeed, incompatible with wisdom proper. Thus, I recognise, and I am also sensitive to the incompatibilist view that there is nevertheless something that Heraclitus is rejecting about polymathy as a kind of 'wisdom', that is, its focus on the many things *as independent things in their manifoldness*. However, this does not entail the decidedly unwise view that experience of many things is anathema to understanding and wisdom.

20 To aid this view, Dilcher (1995) also suppresses B55 (eyes and ears are honoured most) and B101a (eyes are the more accurate of the two); these fragments, in which the senses are mentioned, do not appear in his book. More recently he has joined with others in claiming that B101a refers not to the senses but to a preference against hearsay and for direct experience (Dilcher 2013, 277, n. 14); cf. Granger 2004, 249; Barnes 1982, 114.

21 For example, reading B40 with B22: "Whether concerned with the traditional gods or with geography, - all they produce is knowledge of πολλά, but no sense. This is what Heraclitus wants to do away with in his quest after human self-cognition, as it were the plenty of earth of banal experience and knowledge which hides the gold" (Dilcher 1995, 22).

22 As has been pointed out before by Leshner (1983, 157) "if this is all there is to the contrast, Heraclitus' rebuke of his predecessors (in Frs. 40 and 108) becomes patently unfair, even bizarre".

## 5 From Polymathy to *Noos*

Heraclitus is not purveying a sceptical argument against knowledge gained by experience but, rather, a sort of archaic ‘poverty of the stimulus’ argument. That is, in the absence of some unifying and ordering principle to our knowledge it would remain an impoverished and disparate assortment of unconnected [39] trivia from which nothing unified could be gleaned. This does not, of course, make what is witnessed by eyes and ears superfluous for understanding, rather, it shows them to be stimuli for the recognition of what is common (*xunōi*) for all, the *logos* (B2), and consequently for what we rely on in speaking with understanding (*xun noōi*) (B114).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, as Heraclitus says, even eyes and ears become “bad witnesses” if we “possess barbarian souls” (B107). The incomprehension here is analogous to being at a loss to understand a language in which some meaning is given by an articulate linguistic structure, but one is deaf to it, hearing only ‘bar-bar’ sounds (cf. *barbarous*) or some similarly general impression of the sound-profile of the language. That is, one takes the sounds to be meaningful, but one does not understand their meaning. A corollary of this being that the meaning is distinct from the mere sound.

As Alexander Mourelatos (2008) put it, Heraclitus’ discovery is that the world is “*logos-textured*”, i.e., that language is not a merely dispensable convenience in the search for knowledge. Heraclitus was pushing against the naïve schema of the poets and his contemporaries, who treated language as merely an extension of the body’s ability to be acquainted with an object in space, by literally grasping it, or ostending towards it, or baptising, or directing attention to a distant object, etc. The function of language, on this naïve view, is merely to name things and their parts, and so to verbally ostend and recall. Heraclitus opens up the possibility of a radically new mode of understanding the world through language, by allowing one to attend to the world indirectly through conceptual structures that make manifest the world’s internal structures.<sup>24</sup>

Mourelatos’ prime example for illustrating the difference between the naïve view and Heraclitus’ view is B57, in which Heraclitus reacts to Hesiod’s portrayal, in *Theogony* 748–754, of Day and Night as persons alternately occupying the same house and journeying across the earth, skirting past one another at the threshold. Thus, the relation between Day and Night is presented as being akin to an agreement between persons regarding their spatio-temporal arrangement, that is, an external and contingent relation between independent entities. In B57, Heraclitus rebukes Hesiod for failing to recognise that the relation is instead an internal and necessary *one*. [40]

The teacher of the most people is Hesiod; they are certain that it is he who knows the most things—he who did not understand day and night, for they are one.

D25 [B57], TRANS. LAKS & MOST

Day and Night are given in Hesiod’s naïve schema as apparently independent or *paratactic*<sup>25</sup> entities presented in physical space, which are related to each other externally.

23 The pun in B114, *xun noōi* – *xunōi*, verbally connects speaking with understanding with what is common for all.

24 Mourelatos (personal communication, 2014) puts it like this: “[...] the world seems structured in terms that we can articulate only indirectly by taking a detour by way of language”.

25 Mourelatos borrows the artistic term ‘paratactic’ (from *paratassein*, meaning ‘to arrange side-by-side’) from the field of analysis of literary composition. In this sense, parataxis is a technique whereby elements of a

However, it takes a further insight to understand the *unity* of these opposing modes, one that, according to Heraclitus, was overlooked by Hesiod who was focused instead on the many independent things (cf. Mourelatos 2008, 314–316), that is, *in their manifoldness*.<sup>26</sup> At this point we can begin to see that Heraclitus’ move from a naïve paratactic scheme of explanation to a more *logos-textured* one, as Mourelatos proposed, is strongly connected with the methodological change from *polymathy* to *noos* that we are examining.<sup>27</sup> [41]

To my mind the relevant contrast here is not that between an extensive and an *intensive* evaluation of knowledge (cf. Snell 1953, 18, 144–145), i.e., it is not like an intense emotion, or a difference of *degree*,<sup>28</sup> it is more akin to being able to see the wood for the trees,<sup>29</sup> or, perhaps more accurately, to see the tree for all of the many trees or their transient wooden instances. What is needed is instead the notion of some *one* thing through which many (all) things are grasped in their relation to each other. This is, I believe, the notion of ‘thought’ or ‘plan’ (*gnōmē*) that is found in B41:

One thing, what is wise: to know the thought that steers all things through all things.  
D44 [B41], TRANS. LAKS & MOST

As such, it would be better characterised as a difference between *extensional* and *intensional* conceptual structures rather than extensive and intensive evaluations of

work, in particular its words, clauses, or phrases, are composed without coordinated or subordinated syntax and instead are merely juxtaposed. Mourelatos uses it to refer to the character of the naïve metaphysics of mere things presented in physical space, which is such that “in principle everything will lie open to view, that everything can be visualized. The genius [of this naïve metaphysics] is thus akin to the genius of *parataxis*, the dominant principle of order in Homer, in Archaic art, and in Archaic composition. Each thing will be complete by itself, and the plurality of things will form a whole (harmonious nevertheless) in which all relations are external and explicit” (Mourelatos 2008, 316).

26 David Sedley (2009, 9) follows Mourelatos in this interpretation and adds: “[...] it is easy enough to see why Heraclitus objects to his predecessors’ simplistic assumption: they have been misled by the structure of language into assuming a one-to-one correlation of distinct words and distinct things. Yet on closer inspection language itself challenges the distinction between these items. For in the opening quotation Heraclitus’ names for Day and Night are, respectively, *Hemera* and *Euphrone*, both of which can mean ‘the kindly one’; and it is entirely characteristic of Heraclitus to regard such linguistic patterns as metaphysically revealing. (This particular example, curiously unremarked in the literature on Heraclitus [...]).” Sedley here neglects at least Mackenzie 1988, 19.

27 Kurt Pritzl (1985, 308) seems to have noticed a similar connection when he related Mourelatos’ interpretation to that of Bruno Snell. However, he does not develop the point any further: “Heraclitus prefers what comes from μάθησις, but opposes πολυμαθίη. Snell points out [1953, 18] that Homer by use of the prefix πολυ- values knowledge in terms of quantity, not intensity: ‘From this point of view the intensive coincides with the extensive: he who has seen much sufficiently often possesses intensive knowledge.’ This represents an attitude towards knowledge where, as Mourelatos puts it, ‘in principle everything will lie open to view, . . . everything can be visualized,’ [1973, 32–33; 2008, 316] and where god and human being know differently only in the former’s ability to see more”. This is what Mourelatos calls a naïve or ‘paratactic’ metaphysics of mere things. Pritzl does not go into detail here and seems not to recognise the importance of the connection between polymathy and the paratactic nature of individuals; see n. 25 above for the continuation of the passage that Pritzl quotes. Snell (1953, 144) said of Heraclitus in B41 that “In the place of extensive searching he demands an intensive approach”. However, ‘intensive’ is perhaps not quite the counterpart notion that is required. That is, we do not require something like a *degree* of muchness or an *intensity*. It is difficult to see how such an intensity would produce a recognition of unity any more than an extensive search would.

28 This distinction is either conflated or overlooked by Cankaya (2017, 306), who interprets Snell’s *intensity* by falling back to “knowing more deeply”. However, she then follows Curd 1991 in referring this only to *unity*: “Genuine knowledge consists of knowing more deeply, which requires understanding the whole as a unity, not as an aggregate of perceived facts”.

29 Robinson (1987, 120) also employs this phrase for a similar purpose.

knowledge. That is, the difference between a mere polymathic collection of experiences of paratactic entities, and a thought or insight that grasps or explains the whole by way of recognising what is common, i.e., that which unites these apparently independent entities and thereby unites the wisdom arising from much experience of them. This, I think, is an apt development upon what Mourelatos has in mind when he explains that:

What [Heraclitus] wants to know is not an aggregate or array of things in space but a γνώμη, a thought, and τὸ σοφόν, "the wise." His scorn for πολυμαθίη ['polymathy'] is probably connected with his critical stance towards the paratactic metaphysics of mere things.

MOURELATOS 2008, 319<sup>30</sup>

[42] What is noted here is a categorial difference between a spatial array and a thought, not a difference of intensity. This approach to the matter better captures the focus on the one-many opposition that Heraclitus emphasises time and again. What Heraclitus derides is this extensional understanding that does not provide knowledge of a unified account. Instead, he seeks an intensional understanding in the form of the recognition of what is common to all. This theme is also to be found in other fragments, such as B45 on the soul.

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.

D98 [B45], TRANS. LAKS & MOST

It is not clear that travelling on every road should be taken as a metaphor for an inward journey of reflection as some interpreters have done.<sup>31</sup> It makes much more sense to treat it straightforwardly as being primarily an exhaustive search of the external physical world.<sup>32</sup> That is, much experience in this case does not teach understanding either (cf. B40), and this negative result elucidates something important about the nature of the soul.<sup>33</sup> When read in this way, the reason that the limits cannot be found, even by walking every road, is that the

30 Dilcher (1995, 109) made a similar point, but from the standpoint of his rejection of experience: "[...] Hesiod did know something – but it is only πλεῖστα ['many'], thus amounting at best to πολυμαθίη ['polymathy'] (with B 40). It is, by a pointed contrast, the one which Hesiod failed to realise".

31 Hussey (1999, 104–105) treats the travelling and the talk of limits or spatial 'bounds' in B45 as metaphorical when he explains that "The 'bounds' are spatial only within the metaphor of 'travelling.' They are *logical* limits, that 'mark off' the nature of the soul from that of other things". Dilcher (1995, 49, 75) interprets the talk of travel in this fragment to refer to wandering in the "inward realm of the mind" disclosed by the soul, and that it is the soul's "capability of reasoning" that is "deep and limitless", rather than the soul itself or its nature or definition. Further, he points out that Heraclitus' statement is negative in that it merely says that limits of the soul "cannot be found out by the inward journey of reflection" (Dilcher 1995, 76) and does not say whether there are such limits.

32 There is strong support available for the suggestion that the journey in B45 is not to be taken as being primarily an inward one. As Gábor Betegh (2009, 409) points out: "for Heraclitus' contemporaries [...] it was less unusual to think that, like Odysseus, one has to travel to meet ψυχαί than to think that the ψυχή is the centre of cognition [...]". This, I think, should act as a strong rebuttal to someone who wishes to claim that a reader of B45 at the time would have immediately thought of an inward journey (cf. n. 25 & 27 above). Betegh argues for a somewhat different interpretation, although he nevertheless disagrees with Dilcher's effort to "restrict the 'journey' to introspection and self-reflection. Any genuine experience, about any aspect of the world, makes one's *logos* (or the *logos* of one's soul) deeper" (412, n. 44); cf. n. 35 below.

33 Charles Kahn (1979, 129) suggested something similar when he said that we have as one of our interpretive options taking the talk of travelling every road in B45 to be "a very general image for a search that proceeds in vain: 'I looked everywhere'".

soul [43] is not to be found in the world as other things are; it is not an object of perception and cannot be picked out by ostension as other things are. Hence, its limits (*peirata*) will not be found even by an exhaustive search.<sup>34</sup> Soul's limits, if it indeed has limits, would lie at or beyond the limits of perception, making such limits inscrutable. Finding such limits of the soul in the world is impossible for reasons that could be considered to be analogous to the reasons for why one cannot catch a rainbow even if one were to chase it along every road. The soul is not a thing to be seen or grasped out there in the world. Our knowledge of it, of its limits, cannot be a mere accumulation of experiences, as the polymathic approach would have it, for the soul is not itself an object of experience in the way that external things are objects of experience. However, this still does not say that experience is unnecessary, because the soul is nevertheless the seat of experience and, unless it is barbarous (B107), the seat of understanding and wisdom also. That is, we can nevertheless reflect on its state.

What this shows, I think, is that Heraclitus is reflective upon the fundament or seat of his own thought, i.e., the soul. In answer to the Delphic motto 'Know thyself', he replies, "I searched for myself" (D36 [B101], trans. Laks & Most). It should be pointed out here that this is an archetypical statement of a methodological self-reflectiveness. Through this search he recognises that this kind of reflection is not like seeing and grasping something external to us (cf. B56), like someone in a crowd, but is rather a reflection upon the seat of our own thoughts, which has a deep *logos* (B45), deeper than mere accumulation of experience will allow us to understand (cf. B40).<sup>35</sup> [44]

Hiddenness, often in plain sight, and searching are common themes in Heraclitus. He warns us that "A nature tends to hide" (D35 [B123], trans. Laks & Most),<sup>36</sup> and he exhorts us to hope for the un hoped for otherwise it will not be found (B18). We cannot search for something that we do not hope to find. We can certainly be surprised by what we find, as it tends to be hidden, but a search is always motivated by something searched for as an expected outcome, for example, an answer to some question, which would be recognised as

34 Thus, I am broadly in agreement with Mark Johnstone's explicit connection of B45 with B40 when he said: "[...] his claim that we could not discover its limits even by travelling every road adds the familiar Heraclitean idea that the mere accumulation of information is not sufficient for understanding the soul" (Johnstone 2014, 19). He (2014, 19–20, n. 54) continues in a note: "Such travel might reveal the limits (πείρατα) of, say, the land in which one lives; but the 'limits of the soul' cannot be discovered by such means, even if one travels every road (since the task of understanding a soul is simply not of this kind and is in any case uncompletable, according to Heraclitus)".

35 There is a stark difference between this interpretation of B45, including its connection with B40, and that which was proposed by Betegh, who says that the traveller is "not someone like Hecataeus, criticised in B 40, who travels to some random far-away places in order to collect a hodgepodge of information on various topics. Instead of being a polymath, our traveller is engaged in an unrelenting systematic search that leads to true experience and knowledge, a deep *logos*" (Betegh 2009, 411). For Betegh, who reads B45 with B115, "the deep or extended *logos* of the soul is not a given but a potentiality" (411), which actualises as the result of travelling every road (B45) and thereby the soul's *logos* (its 'report') augmenting itself (B115). He takes the implication to be "the paradoxical message that only the one who travels every road will not find the limits of the soul" (412). See also Johnstone's response (2014, n. 55); cf. n. 34 above. Lest this too become *logos* augmenting itself, I shall postpone full treatment of the issues involved until another occasion.

36 Regarding this translation of B123, Glen Most explained that "*phusis* in Heraclitus B123 DK should most likely be taken not as 'Nature' but instead as 'a nature,' 'a nature typical of a class of beings.' The word also seems to bear the same meaning in the other two extant passages in which we can be fairly confident that Heraclitus used it [B1, B112]" (Most 2016, 119). Graham previously translated "A nature is hidden" (2010, 161) and "Nature is hidden" (Graham 2003, 178), also taking 'nature' to be "the nature of things" (ibid.), which is said to have a tendency to be hidden. Graham (2003) famously dismissed the emotive attribution of the translation "Nature loves to hide" (Kahn 1979, 33, 105: X [B123]), and its resultant personification of nature. For dissenting views on both 'nature' and 'love', based on a more theological interpretation, see Tor 2017.

an answer within some scheme of explanation and understanding. Those who go searching nonetheless have difficulty. Although they expect to find something and do much digging, it is often for but little gain ('gold', B22). Indeed, as Vasilis Politis has pointed out, this attitude of hope in B18 has a strong affinity with the aporetic method that is later developed by Plato:

An *aporia* may be difficult to resolve; it may be as difficult to resolve as anything. It does not follow that it cannot be resolved, or that there is good reason to think that it cannot be resolved. Heraclitus is instructive on this point, when he says that we may hold out hope, may even hope against hope, of finding that which is *aporon* and far from easy to search for – *Try harder!*, as the common exhortation has it. What Heraclitus says is this: 'Unless one hopes for that which is not to be hoped for (*anelpiston*), one shall not find it (*ouk exeurēsei*). For it is hard to search for (*anexereunēton*) and to reach through to (*aporon*)' (fragment DK18). This, I would like to think, fits Plato remarkably well.

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Politis, I think, is correct here in recognising a connection with Plato. For Heraclitus, although what he hopes for is difficult to grasp and requires searching, he is not skeptical about our ability to 'reach through to' it unless, that is, [45] we give up hope, for then all is lost.<sup>37</sup> That is, B18 should not be read *modally*, i.e., as saying that we *cannot* search out nor reach through to our aim, as many translators have done.<sup>38</sup> However, this recognition of difficulty is compatible with thinking, as Heraclitus does, that the aim is hidden in plain sight. The difficulty may be that we fail to recognise what is closest to us or what is staring us in the face.

Indeed, for Plato too the searching for answers can be seen as being in part driven by a need to avoid appealing to merely extensive knowledge of many things. I am thinking in particular of a passage in the *Hippias Major* (286d–289d).<sup>39</sup> Hippias himself is identified as a polymath directly, at 285e, when he enthusiastically offers to memorise the names of fifty archons on the spot, and Socrates replies that the Spartans enjoy Hippias because he knows a lot of things. At 286d–289d, Hippias attempts to answer the question of what beauty itself is by pointing to putative exemplars of beautiful things, e.g., a particular beautiful girl, etc. However, Socrates objects that these cannot act as exemplars of the beautiful, by looking to which we would be able to tell what is beautiful (cf. Politis 2018b). That is, we could not judge the answers to those most pertinent whether-or-not questions that engender radical *aporiai*, such as whether or not some particular thing is beautiful, because those putative exemplars are thereby called into question as being exemplars at all (cf. Politis 2015)q. Indeed, these putative exemplars are undermined by Socrates' questioner on the basis of insights provided by Heraclitus, namely, that the most beautiful monkey is ugly when

37 In a different tradition, Karl Popper (1958, 23) famously took B18 as an influence upon his anti-inductive method in science, and to "express the conjectural character of human knowledge" and "the need to anticipate boldly what we do not know".

38 For example, Laks & Most (2016, 156–157: D37 [B18]) give the Greek "ἐὰν μὴ ἔλπηται ἀνέλπιστον οὐκ ἐξευρήσει, ἀνεξερευνητον ἐὸν καὶ ἄπορον" and translate: "If one does not expect the unexpected one will not find it, for it cannot be searched out nor arrived at". McKirahan (2010, 116) translates: "Unless he hopes for the unhoped for, he will not find it, since it is not to be hunted out and is impassable". Graham (2010, 143) translates: "If one does not hope for the unhoped for, one will not discover it, since it is undiscoverable and inaccessible".

39 For a recent discussion see Politis 2018b. For a more in-depth discussion of the notion of radical *aporiai* and their role in the structure of inquiry in Plato's early dialogues, see Politis 2015.

compared with a human (B82), and the most beautiful or wise human when compared with a god with regard to beauty or wisdom, etc. (B83).

Heraclitus, in his own *aporetic* mode, confronts us with apparent contradictions, which are resolved by a recognition of what is common, gained through overcoming the manifoldness of things presented in experience by grasping their relations to each other, which we come to know through language, that is, [46] by listening to the *logos* (B50).<sup>40</sup> In this way it appears that Heraclitus is an important precursor to Plato.<sup>41</sup> This claim, of course, runs counter to the claims of Finkelberg (2017), regarding Heraclitus being part of a ‘Thaletan tradition’.

What is important in the above comparison is that there is a close connection between the tendency for polymathy and the way in which one sees the world. If one sees the world paratactically, that is, as being made up of many independent things merely externally related to each other, things are then available to be characterised solely in terms of such relations. This leads to a corresponding polymathy, a mere collection of experiences of things in their manifoldness without recognition of their unity.

## 6 Conclusion

In contrast to the claim that we began by rejecting, that Heraclitus was not a philosopher, it would seem that Heraclitus is, rather, a paradigmatic exemplar of a philosopher. We may judge him to be so at least on the basis that he self-reflectively regards his own view as novel when set against that of naïve polymathic thinkers, and thereby also shows that he is reflective upon his own thought in relation to that of others in the discursive milieu.

Heraclitus is not a naïve thinker. This can be recognised when it is understood that there is a close connection between his rebuke of polymathy and the reflectiveness of his thought. He develops his own methodology through a contrast with that of the polymaths and those who tacitly hold a naïve paratactic metaphysics, but has not yet developed, nor even foreseen, a circumscribed philosophy with strictly thematised areas of study, etc., nor should he be expected to have done so.

This shows that he is reflective upon his own methodology and that of others. He argues against their polymathy, in the sense of much learning without a recognition of unity. This does not imply that all experience of the many things should be abandoned. Rather, what is to be abandoned is the experience of many things as *independent things in their manifoldness*, as this is what is insufficient for *noos* and, indeed, cannot lead to a unitary wisdom. That is, to see things not as many paratactic entities presented in experience, but, instead, as [47] part of a structured and unified whole, which we come to know by cleaving to what is common, *logos*.<sup>42</sup>

40 John Palmer (2018, 10) makes a similar point when he claims that Heraclitus “is unique among the early Greek philosophers in inducing *aporia* with the positive aim of provoking his audience to a deeper understanding of the world’s workings”. Despite listing many other fragments, Palmer neglects B18 and the only use of the word *aporon* in Heraclitus.

41 I do not intend to develop or argue for this point further here, as it would require an extended argument of its own.

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