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HERACLITUS' EPISTEMOLOGICAL VOCABULARY

Heraclitus is better remembered for his cosmology than for his epistemology (if indeed he had one), but there are occasional observations about human knowledge, or the dearth of it. In his own inimitable fashion, he made nothing very clear. The reconstructions of commentators provide at most a bare outline of a theory, with many fundamental questions left unanswered: what is the nature of the knowledge which he held set him apart from his predecessors (Frs. 1. 108) and his inattentive fellow Ephesians (Frs. 17. 73. 104)? What are its pre-conditions, sources, or methods? Do Heraclitus' aphorisms convey anything radically different from the similar gnomic utterances of Archilochus, or Solon? In what follows, I will attempt answers to these questions, taking a largely affirmative position on his claim to originality. My approach, obedient to his wishes, is to attend to his λόγος, indeed to his ἔπεα, beginning with the familiar but obscure contrast of νόος and πολυμαθία, and concluding with other less familiar but equally important epistemic terms.

I

In a famous aphorism, Heraclitus denigrates the learning of Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus as mere 'polymathy': πολυμαθία νόον ἔχειν οὐ διδάσκει¹.

It is not obvious that the remark has much philosophical importance; contrasts in a similar vein can be found in earlier Greek literature² and a single contrast of much-but-shallow knowledge with depth of understanding is hardly a theory of human knowledge. It is also possible, as HAMLYN has said, that the contrast is not so much between 'modes of knowing' as it is between the superficial and isolated truths of earlier cosmologists and the one

¹ Fr. 40. Except where noted, the text and numbers for the Greek fragments follow DIELS-KRANZ. Diogenes Laertius mentions the paragons of πολυμαθία, and omits ἔχειν, but Hesiod and Pythagoras are mentioned by a scholiast on Plato's Theaetetus 179e, and ἔχειν, adopted by most editors, appears in Clement Stromata, II, 59. For other ancient sources, see MARCOVICH, Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary (Los Angeles and Venezuela 1967), pp. 61 ff.

² Compare Archilochus' famous remark about the fox and the hedgehog: πόλλ' οἶδ' ἀλώπηξ, ἀλλ' ἐχίνος ἔν μέγα; according to Zenobius (5. 68), the line is also to be found in Homer (perhaps in the Margites); similarly, Margites, Fr. 3: πολλὰ ἠπίστατο ἔργα, κακῶς δ' ἠπίστατο πάντα as in our »jack of all trades«, and Aeschylus: Fr. 286 ὁ χρῆσιμ' εἰδῶς, οὐχ ὁ πόλλ' εἰδῶς σοφός.

profound truth of the λόγος of Heraclitus³. The doctrine of the λόγος is never explained in so many words, but it can be pieced together: the cosmos exhibits ceaseless turmoil (Fr. A6) and opposition (Fr. 80) but it has an underlying unity whose very existence requires continued change, diversity, and opposition (Frs. 51. 53). The hidden principle or power is identified as the λόγος (Fr. 50), fire (Fr. 90), and, in some sense, as Zeus (Fr. 32) and Thunderbolt (Fr. 64). The thesis of Fr. 40 might then be just that knowledge of many other little truths does not suffice to teach knowledge of this single big truth. On this reading, Heraclitus is calling our attention to some gap in our knowledge, but not so much because he is interested in what knowledge *is*, but rather what it is *of*.

Yet there is at least this much more to be said about the contrast: Fr. 55 expresses a preference for those things of which there is seeing, hearing and learning (μάθησις), and Heraclitus shows the same affection for sense-learning in Fr. 35: men who love wisdom must be good inquirers (ἵστορας) into many things (ἱστορία-from φίστωρ, observer, witness). We are therefore entitled to take Fr. 40 to be a contrast of νόος (yet unexplained) with a body of learning or information built up from sense perception.

Νόος appears in only two other fragments. It is paired with φρήν in Fr. 104, but we can gather only that those who follow the poets of the people apparently lack it. Fr. 114 is more informative:

Those who speak with νόος (ξὺν νόῳ) must hold fast to what is common (τῷ ξυνῶ) to all, even more than a city holds on to its law (νόμῳ). For all human laws are nourished by a divine one, which rules as it wills and is sufficient for all, and even more.

Here (for the first time) it becomes clear that νόος is not a native capacity or faculty, but an acquired state or capacity linked with speaking and with an effort (ἰσχυρίζεσθαι) to hold on to 'the common', as Fr. 2 explains, the λόγος which is common. So far then, the sense of Fr. 40 is just a contrast of factual knowledge involving sense perception with some kind of apprehension (usually labeled 'understanding') of the basic λόγος which is common to all things, but which most men fail to comprehend.

This rendering, while not actually inaccurate, is still troublesome. If indeed πολυμαθία does not teach νόος, what else would? If Heraclitus prefers and recommends perceiving and experiencing (as in Frs. 55 and 35)

³ D. W. HAMLYN, *Sensation and Perception* (London 1961), p. 5. Cf. CHARLES KAHN's similar remark: »It is the life of mankind that is the subject of his discourse, not the theory of knowledge and perception . . . questions of cognition are inseparable from questions of thought and action«, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge 1979), p. 100.

why doesn't one acquire νόος from much μάθησις? πολυμαθίη seems as good as many (and better than a few other) ways to διδάσκειν νόον. Further, if this is all there is to the contrast, Heraclitus' rebuke of his predecessors (in Frs. 40 and 108) becomes patently unfair, even bizarre. The single fragment of Anaximander already speaks of a nature unified under justice, of the payment of penalty and retribution for injustices according to the assessment of Time. Heraclitus clearly shares with his fellow Ionian the seminal vision of a nature unified through its subjection to the divine law of δίκη (Fr. 94: »the sun will not overstep its measures, or else the Erinyes, the handmaidens of justice, will find it out«). That Heraclitus was aware of Anaximander's ideas seems likely from Fr. 80 (the insistence on the necessity and rightness of strife). Once this is recognized, it becomes difficult to believe that Heraclitus took his claim to innovation to consist in the articulation of a single cosmic principle regulating change and conflict. Hesiod and Hecateus aside, it is also unlikely that Pythagoras and Xenophanes can be fairly castigated because they failed to sense an underlying λόγος at work in the cosmos. Not for nothing was Heraclitus called 'the obscure one', but, on this version, Fr. 40 borders on the irrational.

The crucial question »how does one acquire the praised and profound νόος?« is never given an explicit answer by Heraclitus himself, and the reconstructed answers given by commentators are various and unconvincing. WINDELBAND's claim that Heraclitus (and his colleagues) all adhered to a 'gross sensationalism' in their account of knowledge is based on an uncritical acceptance of Sextus' Stoic-influenced account of the 'world-reason streaming into the body through the opened senses' (A 16)⁴. CHERNISS, taking Fr. 101 as pivotal, held that Heraclitus proposed an 'introspective route' to knowledge⁵, but this places a severe strain on ἐδιζησάμην ἑμωυτόν (either 'I sought myself' or 'I sought for myself') and it is at odds with those expressions of respect for the testimony of the senses (Frs. 35. 55). VON FRITZ⁶ held that

⁴ History of Philosophy I, pp. 63 – 65.

⁵ The Characteristics and Effects of Presocratic Philosophy, J. Hist. Ideas (1951), Vol. 12, No. 3, p. 333: »the meaning of the world is to be discovered not by looking outward to the phenomena, but by probing one's own soul«.

⁶ Νοῦς, Νοεῖν, and Their Derivatives in Pre-Socratic Philosophy (Excluding Anaxagoras), Classical Philology, 40 (1945) 223 – 242; 41 (1946), 12 – 34. »The harmony in the tension or 'discord' of the bow must not and cannot be 'inferred' in the same way in which the hostile intentions or the presence of a god is inferred . . . it is on the contrary, quite directly visible for him who is able to see it.« Other commentators have left the epistemological questions unexplored. MARCOVICH, for example, views Fr. 40 as a contrast of mere sense experience with 'intelligence' or 'insight' (Heraclitus, p. 64) but he offers no justification for either of these (different) renderings of νόος, and does not explain the basis for Heraclitus' claim to originality.

gaining νόος was simply a matter of perceiving the more subtle aspects of perceptible phenomena (relying heavily on Fr. 56 »men are deceived about that which is most evident«) but this goes against Heraclitus' insistence that the operative principle is hidden (Fr. 54. 123). It is after all possible to be deceived (in some respect) about what is most evident, even when what one is deceived about is not some evident feature (e.g. the true and hidden significance of what is most evident).

NUSSBAUM's perceptive study⁷ of ψυχή in Heraclitus emphasizes the relevance of language and linguistic understanding for Heraclitus' philosophy, and while not free of difficulties the account does move in a useful direction. Taking the βαρβάρους ψυχάς of Fr. 107 to mean »souls not able to understand language«, Heraclitus' thesis becomes:

eyes and ears are evil witnesses to men with souls unable to understand language.

She concludes: »In a fundamental sense nothing seen or heard can be fully understood without language, since it is in learning and communicating through language that a human being learns to relate and judge that which he perceives« (p. 13); »Νόος, or insight, becomes a quality of the well-functioning ψυχή, gained as a consequence of linguistic understanding. « (p. 14).

There is ample reason to think that Heraclitus conceives of νόος *at least in part*, as involving linguistic understanding. Fr. 23 (cited by NUSSBAUM) shows this clearly: »They would not know the name of Δίκη if such things [presumably unjust things] did not exist«; and Fr. 34 (φάτις αὐτοῖσι μαρτυρεῖ παρόντας ἀπειναι) is at least possibly »their speech shows that though present they are absent«. But what is not clear is that this represents the essential role of language in *all* learning. For this, we have only NUSSBAUM's assurance that all judgement and relating of appearances requires language, coupled with the cryptic Fr. 3: »The sun has the width of a human foot«. While Heraclitus undoubtedly asserts that sense data need to be related or connected with one another, and that νόος on occasion involves a proper understanding of human language, he does not assert (nor of course would it follow from just these two assertions) that linguistic competence is required for *all* learning. Finally, even granting that βαρβάρους ψυχάς means »not knowing the language«, the characterization of the senses as κακοὶ μάρτυρες in the absence of knowing the language falls well short of the desired thesis: either linguistic competence or no learning at all.

There is therefore a crucial gap in the available evidence that prevents us from accepting the universalist thesis of NUSSBAUM's interpretation, but there is a second, less universal, connection between language and learning that can

⁷ Ψυχή in Heraclitus, I and II, *Phronesis*, Vol. XVII, nos. 1 and 2 (1972).

be attributed to Heraclitus on solid grounds, and it represents a radical innovation in thought: language competence is not so much a necessary condition for all learning, rather it is the most illuminating model through which to explain the sought for νόος of the cosmic λόγος. To see this, and to appreciate the innovation represented by Heraclitus' teaching, we need to consider briefly what passes as a 'philosophy of language' at the beginning of the 6th century, and two important correlates to νόος: γνῶσις and ζύνησις.

II

On occasion, Heraclitus describes the failure to grasp the (or his) basic truth about the cosmos as a failure in γνῶσις or γιγνώσκειν. Since forms of γιγνώσκειν occur so frequently in the fragments, it is tempting to think (as KAHN puts it) that γιγνώσκειν is Heraclitus' term for »cognition in a privileged sense«, »the insight which men lack and which his own discourse attempts to communicate« (p. 104). In addition, when one contrasts Heraclitean γνῶσις with the simpler γιγνώσκειν of the Homeric epics, or archaic poetry, perhaps it will be possible to measure the philosophical advance being made in his remarks. If, for example, we could accept the SNELL – VON FRITZ' restriction of Homeric γιγνώσκειν to mere object recognition, coupled with (according to SNELL) a lack of appreciation for the effort involved in acquiring knowledge, we could think of Heraclitus' epistemological innovation as first, conceiving of a kind of γιγνώσκειν which has the world order and not a single object or group of objects as its content, and second, recognizing that knowledge is not easy and instantaneous but acquired through effort or striving. Such could easily be the contextually supplied meaning of the νόος not taught by mere πολυμαθῆι.

Certainly, the knowledge men lack or need is frequently said to be a γνῶσις, γνώμη or γιγνώσκειν:

- Fr. 57 Hesiod . . . who did not know (οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν) day and night, that they are one.
- Fr. 41 for wisdom is one, to master the knowledge (γνώμη) how all things are steered through all.
- Fr. 116 It belongs to all men to know (γινώσκειν) themselves and to think wisely.
- Fr. 17 for most men do not think of things in the way they are encountered, nor do they know them (γινώσκουσιν) when they have learned, although they think they do.
- Fr. 78 [for] it is not in the nature of men to have insight (γνώμας) but it is for the divine.

- Fr. 86 [but] most people do not recognize (μη γινώσκεισθαι) divine things through a lack of belief (or trust).
- Fr. 5 . . . not at all knowing (οὐ τι γινώσκων) those who are the gods and heroes.

But it is still not unambiguously clear that the failure (or the necessary insight) concerns the achievement of a certain state of mind or knowledge as opposed to the acquisition of specific information. Is it, in other words, simply a failure to γινώσκειν that is at stake, or merely the failure to γινώσκειν some particular truth? Our initial question remains: is Heraclitus calling our attention to what knowledge *is* (or ought to be), to a 'privileged sense of cognition', or to what knowledge is (or ought to be) *about*, i. e. a special truth?

There is reason to doubt that his use of γινώσκειν is restricted entirely to the achievement of cosmic insights. Fr. 28 (δοκέοντα ὁ δοκιμώτατος γινώσκει, φυλάσσει) allows that one might have γνῶσις of something less than the true realities, and Fr. 56 allows men to be deceived with respect to γνῶσις τῶν φανερῶν, which would be impossible if γνῶσις/γινώσκειν were to be restricted to the grasp of the non-evident λόγος that guides and controls the cosmos. What Heraclitus is deriding is not therefore simply the absence of γνῶσις, but the absence of γνῶσις of his special truth; what is needed is not just γνῶσις of anything, but γνῶσις of the true nature of life and the world.

The same problem afflicts other attempts to show that Heraclitus achieved an innovative sense of γινώσκειν: there may be, *in toto*, an innovation in his coming to know the λόγος of change and diversity, but in what sense is this an innovative conception of γινώσκειν itself? If γινώσκειν had previously been restricted to object recognition, or if it had been viewed as easy, immediate, or automatic, some credence could be given to the proposal. But a review of γινώσκειν from the earliest period known to us fails to confirm these claims.

The comparative evidence from various Indo-European languages (e. g. English *know*, Latin *nosco*, Sanskrit *jna-*, Lith. *žinoti*, Church Slavic *znati*, etc.) points toward a primitive sense for the root (*g*)*no* of 'to note, to mark', and the aorist form γνῶναι would be the original form of the system. Γινώσκω, formed by reduplication and the addition of the 'inceptive' suffix -σκν, would have the sense of 'to come to know, to become acquainted with'⁸. In Homer, the original meaning of the aorist can be seen in passages where someone is said to become aware of the mere presence of a thing or

⁸ See FRISK, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Vol. I (Heidelberg 1960), p. 308; CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque* (Paris 1968). Neither accepts the idea of an original union with γίγνομαι as anything more than a possible hypothesis.

person, and it is often associated with some form of sense perception (usually the sense of sight): »... he glanced (πάπτηεν) then along the line and immediately marked (αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνω) one stripping off the glorious arms, and the other lying on the ground« (Il. XVII, 84 – 86). On occasion, γνῶναι means not just 'noting x' but 'noting that it is an x': »I knew as I looked upon him, that he was a bird of omen« (ἔγνων. . . οἰωνὸν ἐόντα, Od. XV, 532). And, especially in the Odyssey, forms of the aorist mark the discovery of a person's true identity: Eurycleia recognizing (γνῶ) Odysseus upon touching the scar (Od. XIX); Odysseus failing to recognize Athena (οὐδέ σύ γ' ἔγνως, Od. XIII, 299); the suitors' failure to identify the beggar as Odysseus (Od. XXIV, 159: γνῶναι). Forms of the present γιγνώσκω can also serve to mark the recognition or knowledge of the familiar: »A sweet longing seized him to weep and cry, for in his heart (φρεσὶ) he knew them all« (γίγνωσκε. . . πάσας, Od. XXII, 501). This feature of Homeric γνῶναι and γιγνώσκειν has led some to the erroneous generalization that (in contrast to ἰδεῖν, which signals simple perception):

»The term γιγνώσκειν, on the other hand, designates specifically the recognition of this object as something definite: for instance, a shrub, or a mound, or a human being . . . the classification of the object under a general concept . . . The term νοεῖν, then signifies a further step in the recognition of the object: the realization, for instance that this brown patch is not only a human being but an enemy lying in ambush⁹.«

If this were the case, then the use of γιγνώσκειν by Heraclitus (or other pre-Socratic philosophers) to designate a broader realization of the significance of the objects already familiar to us would constitute a departure. But what is usually the case in Homer is decidedly not what is universally the case: γνῶναι and γιγνώσκειν already have a broader employment in the epics, knowing not just who or what something is, but what this means, what its significance is, what the larger situation is, or what the facts really are¹⁰. Odysseus and Diomedes set out to trap the spy Dolon by lying down among the bodies of the slain warriors, letting Dolon run past. When they begin the chase, Dolon »stood still when he heard the sound, for in his heart he supposed they were friends coming from amid the Trojans . . . but when they were a spearcast off he knew them for enemies, (γνῶ ῥ' ἄνδρας θεῖους) and attempted to flee« (Il.

⁹ K. VON FRITZ, Νόος and Νοεῖν in the Homeric Poems, *Classical Philology* Vol. 38 (April, 1943), p. 88. VON FRITZ follows the account given by B. SNELL, *Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vorplatonischen Philosophie* (Philologische Untersuchungen, 1924), pp. 24 ff.

¹⁰ I have discussed this at greater length in »Perceiving and Knowing in the Iliad and Odyssey«, *Phronesis* (1981).

X, 358). The crucial feature of this passage is the gap between Dolon's awareness of the people running after him, and his realization that they are not friends but enemies. That realization, which ought (according to the thesis) to be a form of νοεῖν and not γνῶναι, is just that. There are other significant exceptions to the thesis: Penelope's promise to Telemachus if she learns that Odysseus speaks the truth on all matters (γνώω, Od. XVII 549 = VXII, 556); Odysseus' attempt to discover (γνοίη) who among the suitors is decent and who is lawless (Od. XVII, 363); and Odysseus' sparing of the singer Medon so that »you may know (γνῶς) that it is better to do good than evil« (Od. XXII, 373). Now none of these 'insights', 'realizations' or 'recognitions' qualifies as the grasping of a general principle explaining change and plurality, but they are instances of realizing the true significance of the things or persons one encounters and the nature of the situation. If so, while Heraclitus' γνῶσις of the λόγος *in toto* may mark an innovation, the mere employment of γιγνώσκειν for this general awareness does not.

Nor is Heraclitus the first to believe that knowledge is not easily won. Fr. 19 ('you must expect the unexpected') and 112 ('attending to nature') suggest that effort and attention are necessary pre-conditions for attaining the sought for νόος of the cosmos, but as SNELL has explained¹¹, the idea that γιγνώσκειν may be difficult can be seen already in archaic poetry, in Solon's Fr. 16 (γνωμοσύνης δ' ἀφανές χαλεπώτατόν ἐστι νοῆσαι) and in Archilochus' injunction to his θυμός to know (γίγνωσκε) the rhythm that holds men in its sway (Fr. 67a, verse 7). In fact, the idea that γιγνώσκειν is less than automatic is not (as SNELL believes) a late development at all. As Chantraine observed, the -σκω suffix already suggests »la réalisation du procès par efforts répétées« – as in διδάσκω, etc. – and it is certainly wrong to think that for Homer γιγνώσκειν follows directly upon sense perception. The Odyssey is replete with examples of persons who repeatedly see or hear and yet fail to νοεῖν or γιγνώσκειν¹², and Homer is eminently able to express the difficulties. In the Iliad, γνῶσις can be hard to come by when one is dealing with things seen at a distance (Il. XXIII, 463–469 ff.: now I am not able to see . . . I cannot make out (οὐ εὖ διαγιγνώσκω), and in the Odyssey, Athena assumes so many shapes that it is hard for mortals to recognize her (ἀργαλέον σε, θεά, γνῶναι, XIII, 312). The classic case of the failure to recognize someone is of course Antinoos and the other νόος-less suitors. Taken in by Odysseus' disguise, not one is able to recognize that it is he (οὐδέ τις ἡμείων δύνατο γνῶναι τὸν ἔόντα, Od. XXIV, 159). If, therefore, we are to claim for

¹¹ B. SNELL, »Wie die Griechen lernten, was geistige Tätigkeit ist« in: Der Weg zum Denken und zur Wahrheit (Hypomnemata 57, Göttingen, 1978).

¹² A fuller account of the contrast between the Iliad and Odyssey is given in the Phronesis article (op. cit.).

Heraclitean νόος of the λόγος an advance over his predecessors, it will have to lie in something other than a new notion of γνώσις in and of itself. Even in thinking of γιγνώσκειν as involving effort and difficulty, and in attaching it to a general truth, he is still moving within the limits of earlier epic and archaic poetry.

III

This is not however true for the other key term for the failure to grasp the requisite insight: ἀξύνετος. Here Heraclitus does seem to be pushing the language beyond its previous limits and intimating the existence of a new kind of knowledge. Forms of ξυνίημι appear explicitly in three fragments:

- Fr. 1 Though the λόγος is eternal, men fail to understand (ἀξύνετοι) it, both before hearing and after first hearing.
- Fr. 34 In not understanding (ἀξύνετοι) what they hear they resemble the deaf; the saying (φάτις) bears witness: though present they are absent.
- Fr. 51 They do not understand (οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν) how what differs agrees with itself, the agreement in the turning back, as in the bow and lyre.

These remarks link up with four themes touched on elsewhere: (1) the failure to grasp what is common (ξυνόν): Fr. 2, we must follow the λόγος which is ξυνόν; Fr. 80 we must know that war is ξυνόν; Fr. 113, wisdom is ξυνόν to all; Fr. 114, speaking with νόος, holding on to that which is ξυνόν to all; Fr. 103, the beginning and end of the circle are ξυνόν; (2) the failure to pay attention or heed: Fr. 112, wisdom involves paying attention (ἐπαίοντας) to nature; Fr. 117, a drunken man . . . not heeding (οὐκ ἐπαίων) where he goes; (3) the unity which is to be found in complexity: Fr. 50, it is wise to agree that all things are one; Fr. 41, wisdom . . . to master the knowledge how all things are steered; Fr. 10, collections are wholes and not wholes, what agrees disagrees, what accords does not accord, from all things one, and from one all things; (4) failing to understand what is heard: Fr. 107, βαρβάρους ψυχάς; Fr. 19, not knowing how to listen; Fr. 23, not knowing the name of justice. Such is the λόγος which Heraclitus speaks and nature embodies, but which men fail to grasp: ἐπίστασθαι, γιγνώσκειν, and now, ξυνιέναι.

The innovation inherent in this last way of speaking can best be appreciated by comparing Heraclitus' remarks with the previous use of ξυνίημι. In Homer, the noun form ξύνεσις occurs only once, designating the coming together of two roaring rivers (ξύνεσις τε δύο ποταμῶν ἐριδούπων, Od. X, 515), but forms of the verb ξυνίημι are not uncommon. They generally

carry the sense of coming or bringing together (from συν + ἴημι) either in conflict or in agreement: »Who then of the gods brought them to war with one another« (ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι, Il. I, 8; Cf. Hesiod *Th.* 686, ξύνισαν. . . ἀλαλητῶ); »Follow us, so that at the sea faring ships we many come to agreement about the marriage« (συνώμεθα. . . ἀμφι γάμω, Il. XIII, 381). In what appears to be a different sense of the term, Homer speaks of one person ξυνιέναι another person, where the context suggests not 'coming together' or 'bringing together' but rather simply: hearing: »As he spoke, Menelaus ξύνετο, and spoke back to him winged words« (Od. IV, 76–77). Similarly when Odysseus and Irus exchange threats in the doorway of the house, Antinoos is said to overhear them quarrelling (Od. XVIII, 34):

τοῖν δὲ ξυνέηχ' ἱερὸν μένος Ἄντινόοιο.

There is no hint here of any element of higher comprehension (i. e. understanding, comprehending, etc.), but elsewhere it is less obvious that ξυνιέναι is just hearing; an additional element of attention or heeding seems to be involved. When Nestor describes his early successes, he explains that these men:

καὶ μὲν μευ βουλέων ξύνιεν πείθοντό τε μύθω

i. e. they followed (or heeded) his advice, they were persuaded by his words (Il. I, 273). Similarly, when at Il. II, 26, the dream urges Agamemnon:

νῦν δ' ἐμέθεν ξύνες ὦκα· Διὸς δέ τοι ἄγγελός εἰμι,

ξύνες must mean, not *hear* without delay, but *heed* without delay the advice to arm the Achaeans (cf. Od. VI, 289: ὦκ' ἐμέθεν ξυνίει ἔπος). The connections between the basic 'confluence' sense of ξυνίημι and those of hearing and obeying are not often discussed¹³, but they reflect a primitive common-sense view of knowledge that becomes important for Heraclitus' philosophy. Like ξυνίημι, many Greek συν-verbs bear a basic physical or spatial meaning, and acquire an extended, sometimes metaphorical use: συμβάλλω (to throw together), συντρέχω (to run with), συνάγω (to lead together), συνάπτω (to join together), σύνειμι (to go together), συνέρχομαι (to come together), συνίστημι (to stand together), συντάσσω (to order together), all of these came also to mean alternatively to come together in a battle or fighting, or to agree (or form a compact). Other συν-verbs, also like

¹³ SNELL's *Die Ausdrücke*, pp. 40–59, is an exception, but in *Der Weg zum Denken* pp. 35ff., he disavows his earlier analysis of 'to send forth together'. Nevertheless, he noted the parallel between συνίημι and συντίθημι, and took the latter to mean basically »nicht . . . 'Ich stelle mich zusammen' . . . sondern vielmehr 'ich stelle mir (d. h. mit mir) zusammen'« (p. 44).

ξυνήμι, acquire the extended meaning 'to converse with' συνάπτω, 'to exchange words' (συναλλάσσω), to communicate (συμμίγνυμι – literally to mix it up). Finally, like ξυνήμι, a number of them are used to designate *some* degree of mental awareness or comprehension: συγγίγνομαι (to become acquainted with), συλλαμβάνω (to comprehend spoken words), συμπεριφέρω (to be conversant with). In verbs such as συνακολουθέω, συνέπομαι, and συντίθημι the basic metaphor becomes clearest: we can translate them as 'attend to', or 'understand' or 'hear' respectively, but they are literally 'following along with' a thing or person, and 'placing a thing with oneself', and especially in the middle forms of τίθημι, to place it with oneself for oneself, frequently a plan or song or word in the θυμός (Il. VII, 44), or φρήν (Od. I, 328).

Like other συν-verbs therefore, ξυνήμι ranges across several senses, from the basic literal meaning to a family of extended ones: (1) to join in battle, (2) to unite in agreement, (3) to come together with a thing in perceiving it, (4) to come together with a thing in understanding it, (5) to come to agreement with a person, to heed or obey. The particular relevant sense can only be inferred in context, sometimes imprecisely and broadly (as for example at Od. I, 271: ξυνίει καὶ ἐμῶν ἐμπάζεο μύθων, where it may mean either 'hear and heed my words', or 'attend to and (i. e. epexegetically) heed my words'). The upshot is a primitive common-sense view of knowledge and perception reflected within the very words used to designate those states and processes: to perceive, to become acquainted with, to understand, to heed – these are at bottom 'a coming together with' the external object or person.

It is for just this reason that the fragments of Heraclitus represent a deviation from the received and common sense view embedded within the language: ξυνήμι – genuine ξυνήμι – is decidedly *not* simply being in contact with things. It is not only *possible* to be united and yet uncomprehending, it is in fact (with the single exception of Heraclitus) the universal condition of mankind. Ξύνεσις, in the sense of ὄψις, ἀκοή, μάθησις, is common and easy, but ξύνεσις in the sense of real understanding is altogether separate.

This is the message conveyed through the repeated contrast of presence and absence, contact and isolation, waking and sleeping, perception and genuine understanding. Although men act in the world (the συνεργούς of Fr. 75), they are not mentally in touch with it, they are 'absent' (minded) when present (Fr. 34), without experience even when they've had experience (Fr. 1), as though they had an isolated thinking (ἰδίαν φρόνησιν, Fr. 2), like sleepers (Fr. 89, 73, 75). Understanding i. e. ξύνεσις worthy of the name is not just being brought together physically with a thing, or even being perceptually aware of it, but first of all grasping the deeper meaning of what we encounter, and, second, heeding the message. To state his special message in the existing language, Heraclitus must inevitably speak in paradoxes: there is no grasping

of what has been grasped, no true comprehending of what has been comprehended, no real learning from what has been learned: men have heard the account, but they don't get the message.

In his attempt to call attention to the nature of genuine understanding as opposed to mere acquaintance through perceptual contact, Heraclitus is breaking new ground, although there are some inklings and partial advances in Homer and in one remark of Archilochus¹⁴. Homer *says* that the νόος of men is such as the day which the father of gods and men bring upon them (Od. XVIII, 136), but this is *his* observation on the human 'mental' condition, i. e. his pessimistic assessment of the run of men, that their νόος is just as the day which is given to them, but it is just this condition that leads to their undoing (including Amphinomus to whom Odysseus is speaking). The Odyssey however provides the contrasting class, the man who understands while all about him are uncomprehending (Od. VIII, 533: Alcinoos »strong in νόος«, who alone notices (ἐνόησεν) Odysseus crying; IV, 250: Helen, who alone recognizes (ἀνέγνω) Odysseus in his disguise; XX, 351 the seer Theoclymenus, who sees that the suitors' bloody tearing of the meat presages their destruction:

Wretched men, what evil is this that you suffer? Shrouded in night are your heads and faces and knees below . . . (then to Eurymachus) I have eyes and ears and my two feet, and a νόος in my breast that is not badly made. With these will I depart, for I see (voέω) evil coming upon you . . .

Homer clearly has a sense of the contrast between witnessing an event and understanding its meaning, and the failure of some men (though not all men) to have νόος is a fact of importance for the story of the Odyssey and its hero, »he who is beyond all mortals in νόος« (Od. I, 66). In a similar vein, Archilochus can lament the fact that the »thoughts of men are such as the deeds they encounter« (68 DIEHL). These poetic expressions deserve some notice: while not explicitly philosophical assertions or accounts, they are at

¹⁴ We ought at least to mention the view attributed to Alcmaeon by Theophrastus (de sensu, 25 ff.): »Man, he says, differs from other animals in that 'he only understands (ξυνίησι), while the rest perceive but do not understand' (οὐ ξυνίησι), thought (τὸ φρονεῖν) and perception being different, not, as Empedocles maintains, the same.« BARNES' claim that Alcmaeon »was singular among Presocratics in making such a sharp distinction between perceiving and understanding, sensation and knowledge . . . (The Presocratic Philosophers I, p. 149), is a view at odds with the entirety of this paper. At best, Alcmaeon and Heraclitus should get equal billing, but it is difficult to get the chronology straight. Aristotle refers to Alcmaeon as a young man in Pythagoras old age (Metaph. 986a 29), putting him perhaps near the beginning of the 5th century, and slightly younger than Heraclitus (following the traditional ἀχμή of 40 and Diogenes Laertius' dating of Heraclitus in of Ol. 69 (504 – 501 B. C.). In any event, we have at least equal reason to give the palm to Heraclitus.

least evidence of a reflective outlook on human life and experience¹⁵. What is new in Heraclitus is his repeated hammering of the contrast – and schism – between perception and understanding, and an effort to provide some clues to the nature of the sought for νόος. So far we have seen how Heraclitus breaks new ground in articulating what νόος is not (not just μάθησις, not just πολυμαθῆ, not just ὄψις, ἀκοή, not just being present, not just encountering, not just acting in the world, not just experience), it remains to describe how Heraclitus specifies the nature of that ζύνεσις/γνώσις/νόος in positive terms.

IV

Prominent in Heraclitus' view of human knowledge is the idea that grasping the λόγος of the cosmos can be likened to learning a language; as ΚΑΗΝ puts it, »The world speaks to man as a kind of language they must comprehend« (p. 107). This is not an especially informative metaphor; conceptions of language mastery vary, as do philosophical uses of a 'language model', from Plato to Berkeley. But there are some additional clues.

First, whatever else it may be, νόος must at least involve the grasp of connections between things, not simply the existence or nature of each individual. So much is clear from the motif of the λόγος which is common (ξυνόν) and its apposition with the unconnectedness (ἀξύνετοι) of those who fail to grasp it. Some specifics of the connection are also clear: to understand is to connect one thing with its opposite (Fr. 23. 88. 48) and to know that the opposition is essential to the existence of each (Fr. 51). This holds true for words δική, βίος, etc.) and things (day-night, the bow, lyre, waking, sleep, living, dead, etc.). It is perhaps not revolutionary for Heraclitus to think that things must be grasped in their interconnectedness but the linguistic analogue is original, and for two reasons: (1) the minimally significant semantic unit becomes the complex λόγος rather than the single word, and (2) meaning has been divorced from perceptible phenomena, paralleling the divorce of νόος of the cosmic λόγος from the processes of sense perception. The first of these points has already been developed (in NUSSBAUM's study of ψυχή as the vital connecting faculty¹⁶), the second has not.

¹⁵ There is also the related observation that men can easily hear but not heed or obey (familiar enough of course in the Iliad's account of the behavior of Achilles) in Sim. Fr. 85. 3 B. »The life of man is even as the life of a green leaf'; yet few that receive it with the ear lay it away in the breast (παῦροι δεξάμενοι στέρνοις ἐγκατέθεντο); for there's a hope which springeth in every heart that is young . . .« (from Stobaeus Anthology 98. 29, EDMONDS trans. Loeb, obviously not identical with a contrast of hearing and understanding the meaning of what is heard.

¹⁶ »Ψυχή in Heraclitus, I«, pp. 4ff. The important development of the idea of the 'logos-textured' universe has been discussed by A. P. D. MOURELATOS, Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the Naive Metaphysics of Things. Exegesis and Argument, in: Phronesis Suppl. I, 1973, pp. 16–49.

As the preceding analysis of ξυνήμι would suggest, part of Heraclitus' message is that grasping a λόγος involves discovery of the hidden or nonperceptible relation between perceptibles. For the λόγος of the cosmos, this means realizing that individual events and objects must be placed in essential connections with their opposites upon which they depend and to which they will pass over. For the spoken λόγος, this means that individual words must be placed in essential relations with their opposites in order for their meaning to be understood. In a significant departure, Heraclitus has fashioned a conception of meaning separating significance from the individual word, locating it in the bi-polar contrast between a word and its opposite, a contrast, so we are frequently told, that is un-noticed (λανθάνει) and non-evident (ἀφανής)¹⁷.

Here again, the Homeric contrast is instructive. For Homer, words were essentially atmospheric phenomena, likened to snowflakes on a winter's day (Il. III, 222), or birds in flight (the famous ἔπεα πτερόεντα), or, in the verbal sparring between the champions of the Iliad, aerial arrows¹⁸. Words are contained in the φρήν or φρένας (Il. II, 213): »in whose φρήν were many ill-formed words« (ἔπεα ἄκοσμα). When they are released, they are shaped by the tongue (γλῶσσα, Il. XX, 248), let out through the mouth, escaping the barrier of the teeth (φύγεν ἔρκος ὀδόντων, Il. IV, 350.), flying through the air to lodge in the φρήν of the hearer (Il. V, 493). Words can 'inspire', 'breathe courage into' someone (Il. XIII. 72; XVII, 425; VI, 72) or literally 'sting the φρήν', and a rousing speech can bowl over one's audience »like cornstalks hit by a blast of wind« (Il. II, 147). These expressions all point to a distinctly physical conception of language and communication (perhaps a natural one in a pre-literate society): speaking a language is basically »breath gathering into voice, sound formed into meaning and travelling through the air«¹⁹.

¹⁷ Contra ΚΑΗΝ: »Just as the meaning of what is said is actually given in the sounds which the foreigner hears but cannot understand, so the direct experience of the nature of things will be like the babbling of an unknown tongue for the soul that does not know how to listen« (p. 107).

¹⁸ Cf. ΟΝΙΑΝΣ, *The Origins of European Thought*, pp. 67 ff. and my 'Perceiving and Knowing in the Iliad and Odyssey' (op. cit.).

¹⁹ P. VIVANTE, *On Homer's Winged Words*, *Classical Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, (May 1975), p. 2. I am not convinced by VIVANTE's evidence that the use of ἔπεα πτερόεντα is always occasioned by spontaneity, recognition, shock, fresh reaction, sudden perception or effusiveness. Consider Od. IV, 76–77: Menelaus hears (ξύνετο) Telemachus talking to Peisistratus about the gold and silver lying about. Menelaus then addresses them with 'winged words' explaining that wealth does not ensure happiness. VIVANTE admits that Menelaus' noticing is 'casual' and is induced to speak only by 'a sense of participation', but what is this if not a case of conversation unmarked by violence, emotion, discovery, etc. So far as I can tell, there is no single factor

Homer standardly treats discourse as the uttering of words bearing the quality, i. e. being themselves endowed with the quality, they designate:

ever with soft and wheedling words (λόγοισιν) she beguiled him (Od. I, 56)

when the two had finished battling with wrangling words (ἀντιβίοισι ἐπέεσσιν, Il. I, 304).

he sent him away harshly, and he laid upon him a strong command (κρατερόν μῦθον, Il. I, 378).

with your gentle words (ἀγανοῖς ἐπέεσιν) seek to restrain each man (Il. I, 180).

but to Telemachus and his mother I would speak a gentle word (μῦθον ἤπιον, Od. XX, 327).

and with an angry glance he chided him with a harsh word (χαλεπῶ μύθῳ, Il. II, 245).

but Hector saw him and derided him with shaming words (αἰσχροῖς ἐπέεσσιν, Il. III, 38).

and to those whom he say holding back he spoke angry words (χολωτοῖσιν ἐπέεσσιν, Il. IV, 241.)

There are other similar epithets: 'wise words', 'foolish words', 'pleasing words', 'soothing words', etc. Homer's characterizations of individual words and their production, transmission, reception, and efficacy can leave little doubt as to his physicalistic, indeed 'pneumatic', view of meaningful discourse. In contrast, Heraclitus repeatedly separates the sense of a word from its aural instances: even when men have heard the word, they have failed to grasp its meaning (Fr. 1), the foolish man gapes in distraction at every word (Fr. 87), ears can be 'bad witnesses' (Fr. 107), etc.

The task undertaken by Heraclitus therefore included a revision of the common understanding of language and the process of communication, in concert with the larger program of revolutionizing the common understanding of knowledge. In both cases, we must recognize 'hiddenness', i. e. the non-perceptible character of meaningful discourse, and the non-perceptible character of that νόος, γνώσις or ξύνεσις of the λόγος which rules, and thereby creates an orderly φύσις. In his repeated allusions to the importance of the hidden harmony in diversity, the supra-perceptual nature of the necessary insight, the contrasts of waking and sleeping, deafness and hearing, the need for attention, efforts, and expectation, the deceptiveness of what is

common to all appearances of 'ἔπεα πτερόεντα'; the epithet could suggest (as do ἐκβάλλω, ἶημι) only that words are launched, thrown out, ejected into the air in order to be received by the ears and θυμός or φρήν of another.

most manifest to us, he seems to be saying (to those who would pay attention to his λόγος) that there is not just a new truth to be grasped, but a new kind of knowledge, of which the knowledge of the λόγος is one instance. If we credit the Ionians generally with the discovery of the κόσμος with its 'natural' φύσις as a possible object of theoretical understanding, it seems only fair to credit Heraclitus with the formulation of the idea of a theoretical understanding of which the κόσμος is one possible object.

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DER ANFANG DER 'KATHARMOI' DES EMPEDOKLES

Durch die Auflagen von DIELS/KRANZ' »Fragmenten der Vorsokratiker« hindurch immer wieder retraktiert¹, von WILAMOWITZ im hohen Alter im Kreis der 'Graeca' diskutiert – die Frucht: eine seiner letzten Publikationen² –, schließlich von G. ZUNTZ eingehend kommentiert³, geben die 'Katharmoi' des Empedokles den Nachgeborenen doch weiterhin Probleme auf. Namentlich am Beginn des Gedichts sind elementare, für die Beurteilung des Ganzen überaus bedeutsame Sachverhalte an sich zwar vom Autor durchaus dargestellt, doch sind sie (nicht zuletzt aufgrund einer Textkorruptel mit ausstrahlender Wirkung) nicht eigentlich entschlüsselt: Wen spricht Empedokles als Adressaten seines Werkes an, dazu von woher? Als was stellt er sich dar? (Hierzu gehört die alte Streitfrage: Bezeichnet er sich gar selbst als Gott?) Was verrät er über sein Wirken und die Reaktionen auf seine Person, und wo sind die betreffenden Situationen lokalisiert? Kurz: Rahmen, Voraussetzungen, personale Konstellation jener Belehrung bleiben verschwommen, die in

¹ Im folgenden beziehen sich Verweise auf KRANZ auf die 6., seither immer wieder nachgedruckte Aufl. (1951); VS⁴ bezeichnet die letzte von DIELS besorgte Aufl. (1922).

² Die Καθαρμοί des Empedokles (1929), in: Kleine Schriften I (Berlin 1935) 473–521. Zur Behandlung in der 'Graeca': ebd. 474; ferner: F. SOLMSEN, Wilamowitz in his Last Ten Years, GRBS 20 (1979) 89–122, hier: 90ff.; W. M. CALDER III, The Berlin Graeca: a Further Note, ebd. 393–397, mit anschließender Replik SOLMSENS (398–400).

³ Persephone (Oxford 1971) 179–274. Die noch nach der Arbeit von ZUNTZ erschienene kommentierte Ausgabe von C. GALLAVOTTI (Empedocle. Poema fisico e lustrale [o. O. 1975]) hat, von den im folgenden vorgetragenen Ergebnissen her gesehen, das Verständnis des Katharmoi-Proömiums nicht gefördert; es wird deshalb hier auf eine explizite Auseinandersetzung verzichtet. [Nach Abschluß des Ms. ist erschienen: Empedocles, The Extant Fragments. Edited, with an Introduction, Commentary, and Concordance, by M. R. WRIGHT (New Haven/London 1981). Die dort gegebene Kommentierung von B 112 (264 ff.) macht die vorliegende Behandlung dieses Textes in keinem Punkt überflüssig.]