

Heraclitus

Heraclitus came from Ephesus in Asia Minor; he belonged to an eminent family; he flourished in about 500 B.C. His thought and his writings were notorious for their difficulty: he was nicknamed 'The Obscure' and 'The Riddler'.

They say that Euripides gave [Socrates] a copy of Heraclitus' book and asked him what he thought of it. He replied: 'What I understand is splendid; and so too, I'm sure, is what I don't understand – but it would take a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it.'

(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* II 22)

This attitude of puzzled admiration has been shared by later students of Heraclitus.

It is hard to know how best to present the surviving fragments of Heraclitus' work. The problems of identifying them, of establishing the Greek text, and of translating the Greek into English, are greater for Heraclitus than for any other Presocratic author. (The Riddler delights in puns and word-play – most of which are lost in translation.) But there is a further problem: how to arrange the texts? Any arrangement insinuates some general interpretation of Heraclitus' thought, and every interpretation of Heraclitus' thought is controversial. Some scholars have preferred an arbitrary ordering of the texts. But this is no solution at all – for it suggests that Heraclitus was not a systematic thinker, a suggestion which has more scholarly opponents than advocates.

The following arrangement begins, uncontroversially, with the opening words of Heraclitus' book. Then come two long and complementary

accounts of Heraclitus' thought, which have a number of important fragments embedded in them.

First, then, the opening passage of Heraclitus' book. It is referred to by Aristotle:

It is difficult to punctuate Heraclitus' writings because it is unclear whether something goes with what follows or with what precedes it – for example, at the very beginning of his treatise. He says:

Of this account which holds forever men prove uncomprehending
[22 B 1]

– it is unclear what 'forever' goes with.

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1407b14–18)

More of this text is preserved by Hippolytus (and quoted below) and yet more by Sextus Empiricus:

At the beginning of his writings on nature, and pointing somehow to what surrounds us, [Heraclitus] says:

Of this account which holds forever men prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and when first they have heard it. For although all things come about in accordance with this account, they are like-tiros as they try words and deeds of the sort which I expound as I divide each thing according to nature and say how it is. Other men fail to notice what they do when they are awake, just as they forget what they do when asleep. [B 1]

Having thus explicitly established that everything we do or think depends upon participation in the divine account, a little later he adds:

For that reason one must follow what is comprehensive (i.e. what is common – for the comprehensive account is common). But although the account is comprehensive, most men live as though they had a private comprehension of their own. [B 2]

(Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* VII 132–133)

The first of the two extended accounts of Heraclitus' thought comes from a chapter in Hippolytus' Refutation of All Heresies, in which he

argues that Heraclitus is the source of the heretical views of the Christian Noetus. (The word 'account' in B 1, B 2 and B 50 translates the Greek term *logos*. The term occurs in the Greek Bible, where it is customarily translated as 'the Word (of God)': Hippolytus associates Heraclitus' use of *logos* with this Christian use.)

Heraclitus says that the universe is divisible and indivisible, generated and ungenerated, mortal and immortal, Word and Eternity, Father and Son, God and Justice.

Listening not to me but to the account, it is wise to agree that all things are one [B 50],

Heraclitus says. He rebukes everyone for not knowing this and not agreeing with it, thus:

They do not comprehend how, in differing, it agrees with itself – a back-turning harmony, like that of a bow and a lyre. [B 51]

That the universe is the Word, always and for all eternity, he says in this way:

Of this account which holds forever men prove uncomprehending, both before hearing it and when first they have heard it. For although all things come about in accordance with this account, they are like tiros as they try words and deeds of the sort which I expound as I divide each thing according to nature and say how it is. [B 1]

That the universe is a child and an eternal king of all things for all eternity he states as follows:

Eternity is a child at play, playing draughts: the kingdom is a child's. [B 52]

That the Father of everything which has come about is generated and ungenerated, creation and creator, we read in these words:

War is father of all, king of all: some it has shown as gods, some as men; some it has made slaves, some free. [B 53]

That <...> **harmony, like that of a bow and a lyre.** [Cf. B 51]

That [God] is unapparent, invisible, unknown to men, he says in these words:

Unapparent harmony is better than apparent [B 54]

– he praises and admires the unknown and unseen aspect of His

power above the known. But that He is visible to men and not undiscoverable he says in these words:

Those things which are learned by sight and hearing, he says, I honour more [B 55] – i.e. the visible more than the invisible.

<The same thought> is readily grasped from the following remarks:

Men have been deceived, he says, with regard to their knowledge of what is apparent in the same way as Homer was – and he was the wisest of all the Greeks. For some children who were killing lice deceived him by saying: 'What we saw and caught we leave behind, what we neither saw nor caught we take with us.' [B 56]

Thus Heraclitus gives equal rank and honour to the apparent and the unapparent, as though the apparent and the unapparent were admittedly one. For, he says,

Unapparent connection is better than apparent [B 54]; and:

Those things which are learned by sight and hearing (i.e. by the sense-organs) I honour more [B 55] – he does not honour the unapparent more.

Hence Heraclitus says that darkness and light, evil and good, are not different but one and the same. For example, he rebukes Hesiod for not knowing day and night – for day and night, he says, are one, expressing it thus:

A teacher of most is Hesiod: they are sure he knows most who did not recognize day and dusk – for they are one. [B 57]

And so are good and bad. For example, doctors, Heraclitus says, †who cut and cauterize and wretchedly torment the sick in every way are praised – they deserve no fee from the sick, for they have the same effect as disease†. [B 58] And straight and twisted, he says, are the same:

The path of the carding-comb, he says, is straight and crooked. [B 59]

The turning of the instrument called the screw-press in a fuller's shop is straight and crooked, for it goes upwards and in a circle at the same time – he says it is one and the same. And up and down are one and the same:

The path up and down is one and the same. [B 60]

And he says that the polluted and the pure are one and the same, and that the drinkable and the undrinkable are one and the same:

The sea, he says, is most pure and most polluted water: for fish, drinkable and life-preserving; for men, undrinkable and death-dealing. [B 61]

And he explicitly says that the immortal is mortal and the mortal immortal in the following remarks:

Immortals are mortals, mortals immortals: living their death, dying their life. [B 62]

He also speaks of a resurrection of this visible flesh in which we are born, and he knows that God is the cause of this resurrection – he says: **There they are said to rise up and to become wakeful guardians of the living and the dead.** [B 63]

And he says that a judgement of the world and of everything in it comes about through fire; for fire, he says, will come and judge and convict all things. [B 66]

He says that this fire is intelligent and the cause of the management of the universe, expressing it thus:

The thunderbolt steers (i.e. directs) all things [B 64]

– by the thunderbolt he means the eternal fire, and he calls it need and satiety [B 65] (the formation of the world, according to him, being need and the conflagration satiety).

In the following passage he has set down the sum of his own thought – and at the same time of that of the sect of Noetus, whom I have briefly shown to be a disciple not of Christ but of Heraclitus. For he says that the created world is itself the creator and maker of itself:

God is day and dusk, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and famine (all the contraries – that is his meaning); but he changes †like olive oil which†, when it is mixed with perfumes, gets its name from the scent of each. [B 67]

It is clear to everyone that the mindless followers of Noetus and the champions of his sect, in subscribing to the opinions of Noetus, evidently confess the same beliefs as Heraclitus, even if you deny they were taught by him.

(Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* IX ix 1–x 9)

Diogenes Laertius' Life also offers a summary account, with supporting quotations and paraphrases, of Heraclitus' thought:

Heraclitus, son of Blosson (or, as some say, of Heracon), an Ephesian. He flourished in the sixty-ninth Olympiad [504/501 BC]. He was uncommonly arrogant and contemptuous, as indeed is clear from his treatise, in which he says:

Much learning does not teach thought – or it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

[B 40]

For he says that wisdom is one thing: to grasp the knowledge of how all things are steered through all. [B 41]

And he said that Homer deserved to be expelled from the games and flogged – and Archilochus too. [B 42] He also said:

You should quench violence more quickly than a fire. [B 43]

And:

The people should fight for the law as for the city wall. [B 44]

He also assails the Ephesians for expelling his friend Hermodorus. He says:

The Ephesians deserve to die to a man, every one of them: they should leave the city to the young. For they expelled Hermodorus, the best man among them, saying: 'Let no one of us be best: if there is such a man, let him be elsewhere and with others.' [B 121]

When they asked him to write laws for them, he refused on the grounds that the city had already been mastered by a wicked constitution. He retired into the temple of Artemis and played dice with the children. When the Ephesians stood round him, he said: 'Why are you staring, you wretches? Isn't it better to do this than to play politics with you?'

In the end he became a misanthrope, leaving the city and living in the mountains where he lived off herbs and plants. Because of this he contracted dropsy and returned to the town. He asked the doctors in his riddling fashion if they could change a rainstorm into a drought. When they failed to understand him, he buried himself in a byre, hoping that the dropsy would be vaporized by the heat of the dung. But he met with no success even by this means and died at the age of sixty . . .

He was remarkable from an early age: as a young man, he used to say that he knew nothing, and when he had become adult that he had learned everything. He was no one's pupil, but said that he had

inquired into himself [cf. B 101] and learned everything from himself. Sotion reports that some say that he was a pupil of Xenophanes, and that Aristo, in his book *On Heraclitus*, says that he was actually cured of the dropsy and died of another disease. Hippobotus too says this.

The book of his which is in circulation is, as far as its general theme is concerned, about nature; but it is divided into three sections – one on the universe, one political, one theological. He deposited it in the temple of Artemis, having, as some say, deliberately written somewhat unclearly, in order that the powerful should have access to it and it should not be despised for being hackneyed. Timon describes him as follows:

Among them Heraclitus the mocker, the reviler of the mob, the riddler, rose up.

Theophrastus says that because of his impulsive temperament he left some things half-finished and wrote others in different ways at different times. As a sign of his arrogance Antisthenes says in his *Successions* that he resigned from the kingship in favour of his brother. His treatise gained such a reputation that it actually gave rise to a sect, the so-called Heracliteans.

His views, in general terms, were the following. All things are constituted from fire and resolve into fire. All things come about in accordance with fate, and the things which exist are harmonized by the transformation of opposites. All things are full of souls and spirits. He spoke also about all the events which occur in the world, and he said that the sun is the size it appears. [Cf. B 3] He also said: **You will not find the limits of the soul although you travel all the path – so deep is its account.** [B 45]

He said that conceit is an epilepsy, and that sight is fallacious. [B 46] Sometimes in his treatise he expresses himself brilliantly and clearly, so that even the most stupid easily understand him and gain an enlargement of soul; and the brevity and weight of his style are incomparable.

In detail, his doctrines are these. Fire is an element, and all things are an exchange for fire [cf. B 90], coming about by rarefaction and condensation. (But he expresses nothing clearly.) All things come about through opposition, and everything flows like a river. [Cf. B 12]

The universe is limited in extent, and there is one world. [Cf. B 30] It is generated from fire and it is consumed in fire again, alternating in fixed periods throughout the whole of eternity. And this happens by fate.

Of the opposites, that which leads to generation is called war and strife [cf. B 80], and that which leads to conflagration is called agreement and peace. Change is a path up and down [cf. B 60], and the world is generated in accordance with it. For fire as it is condensed becomes moist, and as it coheres becomes water; water as it solidifies turns into earth – this is the path downwards. Then again earth dissolves, and water comes into being from it, and everything else from water (he refers pretty well everything to the exhalation given off by the sea) – this is the path upwards.

Exhalations are given off by the earth and by the sea, some of them bright and pure, others dark. Fire is increased by the bright exhalations, moisture by the others. He does not indicate what the surroundings are like. But there are bowls in it, their hollow side turned towards us. The bright exhalations gather in them and produce flames, and these are the heavenly bodies. The flame of the sun is the brightest and hottest. For the other heavenly bodies are further away from the earth and for that reason give less light and heat, while the moon, though it is nearer the earth, does not travel through a pure region. The sun, however, lies in a translucent and uncontaminated region, and it preserves a proportionate distance from us; that is why it gives more heat and light. The sun and the moon are eclipsed when the bowls turn upwards. The moon's monthly changes of shape come about as its bowl gradually turns. Day and night, the months and the seasons of the year and the years, and rains and winds and the like, come about in virtue of the different exhalations. For the bright exhalation, when it bursts into flame in the circle of the sun, makes day, and the opposite exhalation, when it has gained power, produces night. As the heat from the brightness increases it makes summer, and as the moisture from the darkness mounts up it produces winter.

He explains the other phenomena in conformity with all this; but he does not say anything about what the earth is like, nor even about the bowls. Those were his views.

The story about Socrates and what he said when he read the treatise (having been shown it by Euripides, according to Aristo) I have recounted in the *Life* of Socrates. Seleucus the grammarian, however, says that someone called Croton relates in his *Diver* that someone called Crates first brought the book to Greece and that it was he who said that it would take a Delian diver not to get drowned in it. Some entitle it *Muses*, others *On Nature*; Diodotus calls it

A sure steerage to the goal of life;

others *Judgement, Manners, Turnings, One World for All* . . .

Demetrius in his *Homonymys* says that he despised even the Athenians, though he had the highest reputation [among them], and that though he was scorned by the Ephesians he preferred what was his own. Demetrius of Phaleron mentions him in his *Apology of Socrates*. Very many people have offered interpretations of his treatise: Antisthenes, Heraclides of Pontus, Cleanthes, Sphaerus the Stoic, and also Pausanias (who was called the Heraclitean), Nicomedes, Dionysius – and of the grammarians, Diodotus, who says that the treatise is not about nature but about politics and that the remarks on nature are there by way of illustrations. Hieronymus says that Scythinus the iambic poet attempted to put his account into verse.

(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IX 1–3, 5–12, 15)

The rest of this chapter assembles the remaining Heraclitean fragments, together with a number of paraphrastic texts. After two excerpts from Stobaeus, the texts are grouped thematically. It must be confessed that the assignment of a passage to one or another group is often hazardous, or even arbitrary. Moreover, when two fragments are quoted together in an ancient source I have kept them together even if they deal with different issues. All this is far from satisfactory – but it is less unsatisfactory than any other arrangement.

Next, then, two short sequences of quotations from the Anthology of John Stobaeus.

Heraclitus:

Of those whose accounts I have heard, no one comes so far as to recognize that the wise is set apart from all things. [B 108]

It is better to hide folly than to make it public. [B 109] = [B 95]

It is not good for men to get what they want. [B 110]

Disease makes health pleasant and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest. [B 111]

To be self-controlled is the greatest excellence. And wisdom is speaking the truth and acting with knowledge in accordance with nature. [B 112]

Thinking is common to all. [B 113]

Speaking with comprehension one should rely on what is comprehensive of all, as a city on its law – and with yet greater reliance. For all human laws are nourished by the one divine; for it is as powerful as it wishes, and it suffices for all, and it prevails. [B 114]

Socrates:

Soul has a self-increasing account. [B 115]

(Stobaeus, *Anthology* III i 174–180)

Heraclitus:

All men can know themselves and control themselves. [B 116]

A man when he is drunk is led by a beardless boy, stumbling, not knowing where he goes, his soul moist. [B 117]

A dry soul is wisest and best. [B 118]

(Stobaeus, *Anthology* III v 6–8)

(Despite Stobaeus' heading, B 115 is generally ascribed to Heraclitus rather than to Socrates. On the other hand, the authenticity of B 109, B 112, B 113 and B 116 has frequently been doubted.)

The first thematic group of texts documents Heraclitus' attitude to ordinary mortals and to other thinkers (compare B 1, B 2, B 40, B 56, B 57, B 108). Only Bias, in the last of the extracts, escapes censure.

Most do not understand the things they meet with – not even when they have learned them do they know them; but they seem to themselves to do so [B 17], according to the excellent Heraclitus. Do you not think that he too blames unbelievers?

(Clement, *Miscellanies* II ii 8.1–2)

Heraclitus caustically remarks that some people are without faith, **not knowing how to hear nor even to speak** [B 19] – he was aided here, no doubt, by Solomon: 'If thou desire to hear, thou shalt receive; and if thou incline thine ear, thou shalt be wise' [Ecclesiasticus 6:33].

(Clement, *Miscellanies* II v 24.5)

The excellent Heraclitus rightly excoriates the mob as unintelligent and irrational. For **what thought or sense, he says, do they have? They follow the popular singers and they take the crowd as their teacher, not knowing that most men are bad and few good.** [B 104] Thus Heraclitus – which is why [Timon] called him 'the reviler of the mob'.

(Proclus, *Commentary on the First Alcibiades* 256.1–6)

The Ionian Muses [*i.e.* Heraclitus] say explicitly that most men, fancying themselves wise, follow the popular singers and obey the laws, not knowing that most men are bad and few good. [Cf. B 104] But the best pursue reputation. For **the best, he says, choose one thing in return for all: ever-flowing fame from mortals; but most men satisfy themselves like beasts** [B 29], measuring happiness by the belly and the genitals and the most shameful parts in us.

(Clement, *Miscellanies* V ix 59.4–5)

The contemptuous and the brash get little benefit from what they hear, while those who are credulous and guileless are rather harmed – they do not give the lie to Heraclitus, who said:

A foolish man is put in a flutter by every word. [B 87]

(Plutarch, *On Listening to Lectures* 40F–41A)

Iamblichus, *On the Soul*: How much better, then, is Heraclitus, who deemed human opinions to be children's toys. [B 70]

(Stobaeus, *Anthology* II i 16)

The *Introduction to rhetoric*, all the theorems of which are directed to this end [*sc.* deception], is, in Heraclitus' words, the leader of liars. [B 81]

(Philodemus, *Rhetoric*, *Herculaneum Papyrus* 1004, col. LXII 3–9)

Some say, mistakenly, that Pythagoras did not leave a single written work behind him. At any rate, Heraclitus the natural scientist pretty well shouts it out when he says:

Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, practised inquiry more than any other man, and selecting from these writings he made a wisdom of his own – much learning, mere fraudulence. [B 129]

(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* VIII 6)

Bias is also mentioned by Hipponax, as I said before, and the fastidious Heraclitus gave particular praise to him when he wrote:

In Priene lived Bias, son of Teutames, who is of more account than the others. [B 39] (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* I 88)

The second group assembles some texts which bear upon issues of natural science.

Heraclitus of Ephesus is very clearly of this opinion [that everything will change into fire]. He holds that there is a world which is eternal and a world which is perishing, and he recognizes that the created world is the former in a certain state. Now that he recognized that the individual world which consists of the totality of substance is eternal, is evident when he says:

The world, the same for all, neither any god nor any man made; but it was always and is and will be, fire ever-living, kindling in measures and being extinguished in measures. [B 30]

And that he believed it to be generated and destructible is indicated by the following:

Turnings off fire: first, sea; of sea, half is earth, half lightning-flash. [B 31a]

He says in effect that, by reason and god which rule everything, fire is turned by way of air into moisture, the seed, as it were, of creation, which he calls sea; and from this, again, come earth and heaven and what they contain. He shows clearly in the following words that they are restored again and become fire:

Sea is dissolved and measured in the same proportion as before it became earth. [B 31b]

And the same holds for the other elements.

(Clement, *Miscellanies* V xiv 104.1-5)

Just as [the principle] alternately makes the world from itself and again itself from the world, and **all things**, Heraclitus says, **are an exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for goods** [B 90], so the conjunction of the number five with itself produces nothing incomplete or alien.

(Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 388DE)

They would think it unreasonable if, while the whole heaven and each of its parts all have order and reason in their shapes and powers and periods, there is nothing of the sort among the principles of things but the most beautiful world, as Heraclitus says, is like rubbish scattered at random. [B 124]

(Theophrastus, *Metaphysics* 7a10-15)

Time . . . is an orderly motion, with measures and limits and periods. Of these the sun is overseer and guardian, defining and arbitrating and revealing and illuminating the changes and the seasons which bring all things, according to Heraclitus. [B 100]

(Plutarch, *Platonic Questions* 1007DE)

Heraclitus: [the Great Year] lasts 10,800 years.

(anonymous *Commentary on the Republic*,
Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1808, col. I 4)

Each of the planets revolves in a single sphere, as though on an island, and guards its order. For **the sun will not overstep its measures**, Heraclitus says, **otherwise the Furies, ministers of justice, will find it out**. [B 94]

(Plutarch, *On Exile* 604A)

In the same way, Heraclitus, transforming what is common, destroys what is peculiar. He is < . . . > when he says that the sun in its own nature is the breadth of a human foot [B 3], not overstepping its

limits; for if it < . . . > the Furies, ministers of justice, will find it out. [Cf. B 94]

(anonymous *Orphic Commentary*, *Derveni Papyrus*, col. IV 5-9)

[The sea] makes for collaboration and friendship. Heraclitus indeed says that if the sun did not exist it would be dusk [B 99]; but we may say that if the sea did not exist man would be the most wild and destitute of animals.

([Plutarch], *Is Fire or Water the More Useful?* 957A)

If it is nourished in the same way [as flames are], as they say, then it is clear that the sun is not only, as Heraclitus says, new each day [B 6], but always and continuously new.

(Aristotle, *Meteorology* 355a12-15)

Heraclitus:

When the months come together [the moon] does not appear for three consecutive days: eve, new-moon, second. Sometimes it changes in fewer days, sometimes in more.

(anonymous *Commentary on the Odyssey*,
Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 3710, col. IV 43-47)

I have discussed elsewhere whether one should suppose that certain days are unlucky, or whether Heraclitus was right to criticize Hesiod, who makes some good and others bad, for not recognizing that the nature of every day is the same. [B 106]

(Plutarch, *Camillus* xix, 137F-138A)

Heraclitus is better and more Homeric (and like Homer he calls the Arctic Circle the bear):

Limits of morning and evening are the bear and, opposite the bear, the boundary of bright Zeus [B 120] - for the Arctic Circle, not the bear, is the boundary of the sun's rising and setting.

(Strabo, *Geography* I i 6)

Some think that the smoky exhalation is smell, since it is composed of earth and air. That is why Heraclitus said that if all the things which exist were to become smoke the nose would distinguish them. [B 7] (Aristotle, *On the Senses and their Objects* 443a21-24)

The third group of extracts bears upon human nature – and in particular upon death (compare B 45, B 63, B 66, B 115, B 117, B 118).

Heraclitus well compares the soul to a spider and the body to a spider's web. Just as a spider, he says, standing in the middle of its web, is aware as soon as a fly has broken one of its threads and runs there quickly as though grieving over the cutting of the thread, so a man's soul, when some part of his body is hurt, hurries quickly there as if unable to bear the hurt to the body to which it is firmly and appropriately joined. [B 67a]

(Hesiodus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 17v)

Heraclitus said that a man's character is his fate. [B 119]

(Stobaeus, *Anthology* IV xl 23)

Does not Heraclitus, like Pythagoras and Socrates in the *Gorgias*, call birth death when he says:

Death is what we see asleep, sleep what we see awake? [B 21]

(Clement, *Miscellanies* III iii 21.1)

We all work together to one end, some knowingly and consciously, others unknowingly – so Heraclitus, I think, says that even those asleep are workers and fellow-workers in the events of the world. [B 75]

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* VI 42.1)

Heraclitus says that for those awake there is a single common world, but that asleep each enters a private world [B 89] – but the superstitious have no common world, nor a private one either.

(Plutarch, *On Superstition* 166C)

Is it remarkable that the cuttable should be cut, the meltable melt, the burnable burn and the destructible be destroyed? And when is death not present in our very selves? As Heraclitus says,

†the same thing, there are present† living and dead, the awake and the sleeping, young and old; for the latter change and are the former, and again the former change and are the latter. [B 88]

([Plutarch], *Consolation to Apollonius* 106DE)

What is said of sleep should be understood also of death. For each state – the one more, the other less – shows the absence of the soul, as we can also learn from Heraclitus:

†A man in the dusk looks for a light, his sight being quenched; living, he looks on the dead while sleeping; awake, he looks on the sleeping.† [B 26]

(Clement, *Miscellanies* IV xxii 141.1-2)

Orpheus wrote:

Water is death for souls . . .

But from water comes earth, from earth again water,

and thence soul, springing through all the ether.

Heraclitus, basing his remarks on these lines, writes as follows:

For souls it is death to become water, for water death to become earth; but from earth water comes into being, from water soul. [B 36]

(Clement, *Miscellanies* VI ii 17.1-2)

They think that souls live in the water, which is breathed on by god, as Numenius says. . . . Hence (they say) Heraclitus says that for souls it is pleasure, not death, to become moist [B 77], and that for them the fall into birth is pleasure; and elsewhere he says that we live their death and they live our death. [Cf. B 62]

(Porphyry, *The Cave of the Nymphs* 10)

Heraclitus is clearly berating birth when he says:

Being born, they wish to live and to meet their doom (or rather, to rest) and they leave behind children, born for their doom [B 20]; and Empedocles plainly agrees with him.

(Clement, *Miscellanies* III iii 14.1)

Flavours need salt to stir perception – otherwise they strike the taste as heavy and nauseous; for corpses should be thrown out more readily than dung [B 96], according to Heraclitus, and meat is corpse or part of a corpse. (Plutarch, *Table Talk* 668F–669A)

Heraclitus seems to agree with [Socrates in the *Phaedo*] when, speaking of men, he says:

There await men when they die things they neither expect nor even believe. [B 27] (Clement, *Miscellanies* IV xxii 144.3)

Such rites are suitable to night and fire and to the noble – or rather, foolish – people of the Eretheids, and also to the rest of the Greeks, for whom await when they die things they do not expect. [Cf. B 27] For whom does Heraclitus prophesy? For night-prowlers, magicians, bacchants, revellers, initiates – for them he threatens what comes after death, for them he prophesies fire. For the mysteries practised among men are impious initiations. [B 14]

(Clement, *Protreptic* II 22.1–2)

Good souls . . . must spend a fixed time in the gentlest region of the air, which they call the meadows of Hades . . . They are nourished by any sort of exhalation, and Heraclitus was right in saying that souls smell things in Hades. [B 98]

Plutarch, *On the Face in the Moon* 943C, E)

Fourthly, there are some items which may be reckoned as belonging to moral and political philosophy (compare B 43, B 44, B 114, B 121).

For 'the law is not made for a righteous man', the Scriptures say [I Timothy 1:9]. Thus Heraclitus rightly says:

They would not know the name of justice if these things did not exist [B 23], and Socrates says that law would not have come into being for the sake of good men. (Clement, *Miscellanies* IV iii 10.1)

Worse men have conquered better, but to set up in your soul a victory monument over anger – with which Heraclitus says it is hard to fight,

for whatever it wants, it buys with soul [B 85] – that is a mark of great and victorious strength. (Plutarch, *The Control of Anger* 457D)

Next, Heraclitus says:

Gods and men honour those slain in battle. [B 24] (Clement, *Miscellanies* IV iv 16. 1)

For a greater doom wins a greater share [B 25], according to Heraclitus. (Clement, *Miscellanies* IV vii 49.3)

Envy, the greatest of political ills, scarcely attacks old age; for dogs bark at those they do not know, according to Heraclitus [B 97], and envy attacks the beginner as it were at the door of office and does not give him entrance. (Plutarch, *Should Old Men Take Part in Politics?* 787C)

This work is not for dilettantes but for those who are sufficiently diligent and serious. There are very few such men today; but, as Heraclitus says, one man for me is ten thousand [B 49] and I would rather write for that one than for ten thousand who are worth one man or no one at all. (Galen, *On the Diagnosis of Pulses* VIII 773)

Always remember Heraclitus' view that the death of earth is to become water, and the death of water to become air, and of air fire, and the reverse. [Cf. B 76] Remember too the man who forgets where the road leads [B 71]; and that they differ from that with which they most constantly associate – the account which governs everything; and that what they meet with every day seems foreign to them [B 72]; and that we should not act and speak like sleepers [B 73] (for then too we think we act and speak), nor like children of our parents [B 74] (i.e., in plain prose, in the way in which we have been brought up).

(Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* IV 46.1–6)

The fifth group collects fragments of a theological and a religious significance.

I know that Plato, too, supports Heraclitus who writes:

One alone is the wise, unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus. [B 32]

And again:

It is law also to follow the counsel of one. [B 33]

And if you want to adduce the saying 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear' [Luke 14:35], you will find it expressed somewhat as follows by the Ephesian:

The uncomprehending, when they hear, are like the deaf. To them applies the saying: though present they are absent. [B 34]

(Clement, *Miscellanies* V xiv 115.1-3)

[All animals] are born, flourish and die in obedience to the ordinances of god; for every beast is pastured by blows [B 11], as Heraclitus says.

([Aristotle], *On the World* 401a8-11)

A man may perhaps escape the attention of the visible light, but the intelligible he cannot – for, as Heraclitus says, how could anyone escape the attention of that which never sets? [B 16] Then let us not wrap ourselves in darkness; for the light is within us.

(Clement, *The Tutor* II x 99.5)

In all respects superior to us, [god] is especially unlike and different from us in his acts; but of divine acts, the majority, according to Heraclitus, **escape our knowledge through lack of trust.** [B 86]

(Plutarch, *Coriolanus* xxxviii, 232D)

Heraclitus, finding fault with those who sacrifice to the spirits, says: **They vainly purify themselves with blood when they are defiled, as though you stepped in mud and then washed in mud. Any man who saw you doing so would think you were mad. And they pray to these statues as though one were to gossip to the houses, not knowing who the gods and who the heroes are.** [B 5]

The same man said to the Egyptians:

If they are gods, why do you mourn them? If you mourn them, no longer think them gods. [B 127]

... Heraclitus, seeing the Greeks giving honour to the spirits, said: **They pray to statues of demons who do not hear them as though they heard them; they do not give as though they had not asked.** [B 128]

(anonymous *Theosophy* 68-69, 74)

As a mystical reminder of that affair, phalluses are set up to Dionysus in the cities. **For if they did not make a procession for Dionysus and sing a paean to the penis, they would act most shamelessly,** Heraclitus says, and Hades is the same as Dionysus for whom they **rave and ritualize** [B 15] – not, I think, from drunkenness of the body so much as from a disgraceful inculcation of licentiousness.

(Clement, *Protreptic* II 34.5)

Hence Heraclitus reasonably called [phallic ceremonies] remedies, since they will cure our troubles and drain our souls of the misfortunes of birth. [B 68]

(Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* I xi)

Do you not see with what grace Sappho's verses charm and seduce the hearer? But the Sibyl, with raving mouth, according to Heraclitus, speaking without mirth or adornment or perfume [B 92], traverses with her voice a thousand years with the help of the god.

(Plutarch, *Why the Pythia No Longer Prophesies in Verse* 397AB)

I think that you know Heraclitus' remark that the king whose is the oracle at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals but indicates [B 93] – attend to these wise words and suppose that here the Pythia gets her voice from the god as the moon gets its light from the sun.

(Plutarch, *Why the Pythia No Longer Prophesies in Verse* 404 E)

The sixth group of passages (with which compare B 54 and B 55) concerns Heraclitus' view of the scope and nature of human knowledge.

Nevertheless, [Celsus] wanted to show that this too was a fiction we [Christians] had taken from the Greek sages who said that human wisdom is one thing, divine wisdom another. And he quotes remarks of Heraclitus, in one of which he says:

For human ways have no insights, divine ways have [B 78]; and in another:

Men are called infantile by spirits as children are by men. [B 79]
(Origen, *Against Celsus* VI xii)

Perhaps it is not pleasing to God that such harmony should ever be found among men. For nature, according to Heraclitus, likes to hide itself [B 123] – and still more so the creator of nature, whom we especially revere and admire because knowledge of him is not readily gained.
(Themistius, *Speeches* V 69B)

According to [the Pyrrhonists], Xenophanes and Zeno of Elea and Democritus were sceptics . . . Also Heraclitus:
Let us not conjecture at random about the most important things.
[B 47] (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* IX 73)

Let these notes . . . as their name says, be miscellaneous, passing continually from one item to another . . . For those who search for gold, says Heraclitus, dig over much earth and find a little. [B 22]
(Clement, *Miscellanies* IV ii 4.2)

Hence the apostle exhorts us that 'our faith should not stand in the wisdom of men' who promise to persuade us, 'but in the power of God' [I Corinthians 2:5], which alone can save us without proofs and by mere faith. For the most esteemed know and guard what they believe [B 28a], and moreover justice will convict the fashioners and wittnesses of falsehoods [B 28b], as the Ephesian says. For he too learned from non-Greek philosophy about the purification through fire of those who have lived evil lives. (Clement, *Miscellanies* V i 9.2–4)

Thus the prophet's remark, 'If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not understand' [Isaiah 7:9], is proved abundantly true. And Heraclitus of Ephesus was paraphrasing it when he observed:

If you do not expect the unexpected you will not discover it; for it is hard to track down and difficult to approach. [B 18]
(Clement, *Miscellanies* II iv 17.4)

It has been divinely shown that knowledge and ignorance are the boundaries of happiness and unhappiness. For philosophical men must be versed in very many things [B 35], according to Heraclitus, and it is in truth necessary to 'wander many ways in the search to be good'.
(Clement, *Miscellanies* V xiv 140.5–6)

Heraclitus says, as though he had achieved something great and noble, I inquired into myself [B 101], and of the rules at Delphi 'Know thyself' was thought the most divine.
(Plutarch, *Against Colotes* 1118C)

[Heraclitus] rejects perception when he says, in these words:
Bad witnesses for men are the eyes and ears of those who have foreign souls [B 107] – i.e. it is the mark of a foreign soul to trust in non-rational perceptions.
(Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* VII 126)

We have two natural instruments, as it were, by which we learn everything and conduct our business, namely hearing and sight; and sight, according to Heraclitus, is not a little truer – for eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears. [B 101a]
(Polybius, *Histories* XII xxvii 1)

The final group of texts can be given the vague label 'metaphysics': first, the relatively sparse references to the 'theory of flux'; then the more numerous items which bear upon the nature of contraries or opposites and their puzzling unity (compare B 50, B 51, B 59, B 60, B 61, B 62, B 67, B 111).

Heraclitus says somewhere that everything moves and nothing rests; and, comparing what exists to a river, he says that you would not step twice into the same river.
(Plato, *Cratylus* 402A)

On the subject of the soul, Cleanthes sets out the doctrines of Zeno [the Stoic] and compares them to those of the other natural scientists. He says that Zeno, like Heraclitus, says that the soul is an exhalation

capable of perception. For, wanting to show that souls as they are exhaled always become new, he likened them to rivers, saying:

In the same rivers ever different waters flow – and souls are exhaled from what is moist. [B 12]

So Zeno, like Heraclitus, says that the soul is an exhalation; but he says that it is capable of perception for the following reasons . . .

(Arius Didymus, *Epitomes* fragment 39 Diels, in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel XV xx 2*)

Heraclitus the Obscure gives a theological account of the natural world as being unclear and capable of being guessed at by way of symbols. He says:

Gods are mortal, men immortal, living their death, dying their life.

[Cf. B 62]

And again:

We step and do not step into the same rivers, we are and we are not. [B 49a]

Everything he says about nature is riddling and allegorical.

(Heraclitus, *Homeric Questions* 24.3–5)

Old Heraclitus of Ephesus was called clever because of the obscurity of his remarks:

Cold things become hot, hot cold, wet dry, parched moist. [B 126]

(Tzetzes, *Commentary on the Iliad*, p.126 Hermann)

All mortal nature, lying between generation and destruction, offers only a dark and unstable show and appearance of itself . . . Reason can grasp nothing which is at rest or which is really real; for it is not possible to step twice into the same river, according to Heraclitus, nor to touch mortal substance twice in [the same] condition: by the swiftness and speed of its change, it scatters and collects again – or rather, it is not again and later but simultaneously that it comes together and departs, approaches and retires. [B 91]

(Plutarch, *On the E at Delphi* 392AB)

Things which have this movement by nature are preserved and stay

together because of it – if indeed, as Heraclitus says, the barley-drink separates if it is not moving. [B 125] (Theophrastus, *On Vertigo* 9)

I wonder . . . how my soul has come to be in my body, being as it appears in itself although it is in a body. For Heraclitus, who urges us to inquire into this, posits necessary exchanges between contraries [cf. B 90], and talks of a **path up and down** [cf. B 60], and **changing**, it rests [B 84a], and it is **weariness to labour at the same tasks and to be ruled** [B 84b] – he leaves us to conjecture and omits to make his argument clear to us, no doubt because we should inquire for ourselves as he himself inquired and found. [Cf. B 101.]

(Plotinus, *Enneads* IV viii 1.8–17)

[Celsus] says that the ancients refer riddlingly to a war among the gods, as when Heraclitus says:

You should know that war is comprehensive, that justice is strife, that all things come about in accordance with strife and with what must be. [B 80]

(Origen, *Against Celsus* VI xlii)

They say it is indecent if the sight of warfare pleases the gods. But it is not indecent; for noble deeds please. Again, wars and battles seem terrible to us, but to God not even they are terrible. For all things complete the harmony of the universe. So Heraclitus says that to God all things are fair and just but men have supposed some things to be unjust and others just. [B 102]

(Scholia b and T on Homer, *Iliad* IV 4)

Surely nature yearns for contraries and effects harmony from them and not from similars . . . That was also said by Heraclitus the Obscure: **Combinations – wholes and not wholes, concurring differing, concordant discordant, from all things one and from one all things.** [B 10]

In this way the structure of the universe – I mean, of the heavens and the earth and the whole world – was arranged by one harmony through the blending of the most contrary principles.

([Aristotle], *On the World* 396b7–8, 20–25)

On these matters [the love of like for like] some seek a deeper and more scientific account. Euripides says that the earth when dried up longs for rain, and the majestic heaven when filled with rain longs to fall to the earth. Heraclitus says that what is adverse concurs, that the noblest harmony comes from things which differ [B 8], and that everything comes about in accordance with strife. [Cf. B 80]

(Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155b2-6)

It seems that the ancients used the word *bios* ambiguously to mean 'bow' and 'life'. For example, Heraclitus the Obscure:

Thus the word for the bow is *bios*, its deed is death. [B 48]

(*Etymologicum Magnum*, s.v. *bios*)

But the circumference of a circle as a whole no longer <has a direction>; for whatever point on it you think of is both a beginning and an end – for beginning and end on the circumference of a circle are the same, according to Heraclitus. [B 103]

(Porphyry, *Notes on Homer*, on *Iliad* XIV 200)

Socrates: Very well. I see that when he asks that question we must answer thus: 'My dear man, Don't you realize the truth of Heraclitus' remark that the most beautiful ape is ugly compared to another kind [B 82], and that the most beautiful of pots is ugly compared to a woman, as Hippias the Wise says? Isn't that so, Hippias? Hippias: Yes, Socrates, an excellent answer.

Socrates: Now next I'm sure he'll say: 'Well, Socrates, if someone compares a woman to a god, won't the same thing happen as when pots were compared to women? Won't the most beautiful woman appear ugly? Doesn't Heraclitus – whom you adduce – say the same thing, that in relation to god the wisest of men will seem an ape in wisdom and beauty and everything else?' [B 83]

(Plato, *Hippias Major* 289AB)

It seems that each animal has its own pleasure . . . The pleasures of horses, dogs and men are different – so Heraclitus says that donkeys would prefer rubbish to gold [B 9] (for food is more pleasing to

donkeys than gold).

(Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176a3, 5-8)

Dry dust and ash . . . should be put down [in the poultry-run] so that the birds can sprinkle themselves with it; for this is how they wash their feathers and wings, if we are to believe Heraclitus of Ephesus who says that pigs wash in mud and farmyard birds in dust or ashes. [B 37]

(Columella, *On Agriculture* VIII iv 4)

[Vetch] is the cow's favourite pasture, and cows eat it with pleasure. Hence Heraclitus said that if happiness resided in bodily pleasures, we should call cows happy when they find some vetch to eat. [B 4]

(Albert the Great, *On Plants* V iii 14)