1. The teaching of Heraclitus 'The Obscure' who lived around 500 BC survives only in fragments reported by other ancient authors. There is a good chance that it never had the form of a running discourse. Probably it always consisted of obscurely related but independent, or largely independent, thoughts: snippets, sayings, epigrams or aphorisms more nearly resembling poetic outbursts or isolated oracles than parts of a consecutive argument.

Like bits of a puzzle the fragments can be taken up in any order and are perhaps best appreciated in that fashion. One saying declares: 'The fairest kosmos is a pile of random scraps.' (D 124)¹

The following reflections on Heraclitus also have a fragmentary character: they provide only glances from various angles and do not pretend to deal thoroughly with any topic. Owing to the extreme breadth of this necessarily brief study specific points cannot be argued at any length. Nonetheless my hope is that light

¹ My versions of the fragments are adaptations of translations provided by John Burnet, Charles H. Kahn, Philip Wheelwright, G.S. Kirk and Jonathan Barnes. Especially where fragments are very short and/or straightforward there is little if any difference between my versions and those provided by these authors. For purposes of reference I have followed the numbering scheme of Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz. No particular endorsement of this scheme is implied. Given that any arrangement is conjectural (not simply because a particular scheme may or may not reflect the original order but because there may not be an original order as such to reflect!) there is much to be said in favour of a purely random arrangement, such as might be achieved by printing the sayings one to a card and then shuffling them. I suspect that students of Heraclitus would benefit from the surprising and insightful juxtapositions.
will be shed on Heraclitus through a clear recognition of the magical-poetic dimension from which his thinking begins.

2. Despite appearing to be ‘random scraps’ the fragments are remarkably consistent with one another and intimate a single perspective on life. Though they talk about apparently unrelated things they offer fleeting glimpses of the same thing. That the diverse observations are aspects of one large truth is supported by a sizeable group of sayings whose gist is given by the fragment: ‘Heeding not me but the logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.’ (D 50)

3. The word ‘logos’ is central for Heraclitus. In ancient Greek it means principle, plan, pattern, discourse or account. It can also mean meaning itself. Heraclitus seems to have chosen the word because it had so many connotations that were useful to his purpose. Though I myself lean toward a definition that combines the idea of a principle with that of a meaning, the best definition for a particular fragment is given by the context of the word in that fragment. The best overall understanding—which may never find exact formulation—is determined by the word’s overall context. That is to say its meaning is given by the entire Heraclitean opus. For that reason I have left ‘logos’ untranslated in my versions of the fragments.

4. Broadly speaking Heraclitus teaches the art of seeing through the given world to its hidden core. Those who cling to the outward forms of things miss their ultimate meaning and value. Those who see beyond them witness their participation in a supernal reality. Particulars that appear at odds with each other come together in a single ineffable truth.

The same knack of seeing through surfaces seems required to make sense of the fragments as a whole.²

² A good deal of argument is spent trying to decide which of the existing fragments is genuine. The only certain conclusion is that none of them is certainly in the words of the author. My view is that the fragments must be judged on how well they support the emergent meaning of the whole. If they agree with the overall sense then they must be counted as reflections
5. An early epigram reported by Scythinus of Teos goes: 'Do not be in a hurry to unwind to the centre-stick the roll of Heraclitus the Ephesian; the path is hard indeed to traverse. There is gloom and unrelieved darkness; but if an initiate lead you, it shines more brightly than the shining sun.'

Diogenes Laertius records a story in which Socrates says of Heraclitus' teaching: 'What I understand is splendid; and I think that what I don't understand is so too—but it would take a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it.'

The point is that Heraclitus seems not to want to be understood too easily or too quickly. Readers are obliged to grapple with the thoughts. My own view is that the skills needed to navigate these difficult waters are among the same ones needed to find meaning in everyday life.

6. Fortunately the fragments provide useful advice for their own unravelling. Here are a number of sayings that can be taken as instruction in understanding Heraclitus:

'Whoever does not expect the unexpected will not find it, for it is hard to discover and difficult to grasp.' (D 18)

'The hidden connection is better than the apparent one.' (D 54)

'I have searched for my self.' (D 101) [Look within. Be ready to provide an inward context for the sayings.]

'The king whose oracle is at Delphi neither declares nor veils but gives signs.' (D 93) [Look for hints rather than plain meanings.]

'It is weariness to labour at the same things and to be ruled by them.' (D 84b) [Allow plenty of time between readings!]

of the original thought, even though their credentials might be suspect. If they are blatantly at odds with the overall sense then there is good reason for doubting their authenticity. In other words the logos (in the sense of a single thrust or meaning that gives coherence to parts of a whole) and the logos alone should be the central criterion. That same criterion should determine whether contextual remarks made by Heraclitus' preservers are pertinent to his sayings.


7. An important key to understanding Heraclitus is the knowledge that his main terms and images are 'signs' for the same thing. Fire, gold, wakefulness, the common, the thunderbolt, the soul, Zeus, the river, wisdom, the unexpected and the logos itself—all have a single reference. The use of such diverse terms for the same matter (which in a sense is never named) is a good demonstration of the fragment: 'Heeding not me but the logos it is wise to agree that all things are one.' (D 50)

On that basis it seems that any image whatever might have been used. If all things amount to the same thing then any one of them can stand for the whole. Yet some things appear to reveal oneness—at least the oneness Heraclitus has in mind—better than others, and these become the mainstays of his teaching.

Among the many figures employed by Heraclitus the image of fire seems more immediately rewarding than the rest.

8. Fire for Heraclitus is primarily a subtle region of soul that is the point of origin and point of return for life's manifold forms and events. It therefore describes the unitary and enduring core of reality, beyond apparent differences and beyond the apparent comings and goings of particular beings. For those who attain to a knowledge of fire the manifest order of things is fire incognito while the hidden order is fire's proper dimension, the region where it discloses itself truly.

An important saying declares: 'All things are a trade for fire, and fire for all things, just as goods for gold and gold for goods.' (D 90)

9. Probably the most famous Heraclitean fragment is: 'This kosmos which is the same for all was made by no god or man but was, is and always will be everliving fire, with measures kindling and measures going out.' (D 30)

The kosmos or order in question seems to be the world. Yet it is regarded from a perspective that shows it to be a manifestation of fire. That vantage-point must be a region at the very heart of the conflagration, where life's inmost nature is plain: a dimension of secret fire that is paradoxically one with and separate from the everyday sphere. This is the central or original flame, of which the
elements of ordinary experience are crude exchanges or distant expressions.

As will be shown later, specifically in relation to the theme of circulation, the phrase ‘with measures kindling and measures going out’ refers to particular souls dwelling at the fringe of illumination. Soul-embers that draw near the fire take flame and become indistinct from it (i.e. they realise their participation in what is ‘everliving’ and ‘one’); soul-embers that depart the central region grow dim (i.e. the truth of fire no longer shines in them).

As to the essential nature of Heraclitean fire much can be reliably guessed. People in his time would have associated it with divinity and immortality and would have tended to equate it with the highest region of heaven. Accordingly feelings of purity, elevation, sublimity and awe would have informed the image of everliving fire. Since the aerial element is subsumed under fire in the thinking of Heraclitus, intimations of vastness and freedom would have pertained, as would the sense of creative freedom previously evoked by Anaximander’s ‘Boundless’ dimension—in many respects the forerunner of Heraclitus’ fire-realm. To this must be added the manifold associations of liveliness, warmth and light that naturally accrue to fire.

10. The emotive, intuitive and adventurous connotations of fire cannot be overlooked where Heraclitus is concerned, for his thinking is essentially magical and poetic. Taken prosaically or at face value most of the sayings can hardly be understood at all. They seem trivial at best, nonsensical at worst.

11. Here is an example of a fragment that is trivial from an unadventurous perspective: ‘Donkeys favour rubbish over gold.’ (D 9)

This is simply true, especially when the ‘rubbish’ in question is straw, as the word is often translated. Those readers who believe

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‘The fire in question is not simply that which burns in the hearth... The cosmological fire must be thought of primarily as... that purer kind which in popular thought fills the upper region of the heavens and is considered to be divine and immortal, to be the essence of heavenly bodies, and according to one view the place of favoured or pure souls.’ Kirk, 316.
that there is inherent worth in gold might conclude that people are smarter than donkeys. That is about as far as prosaic thinking can go.

Poetic thinking goes further. It detects a hidden agenda. The author of the everliving-fire fragment is unlikely to have said anything as dim as that donkeys prefer rubbish to gold unless he expected readers to pursue the words beyond their common-sense limits. This seems to be Heraclitus' way of teaching the 'hidden connection': by obliging his followers to think beyond what is given, in daily experience as well as in words.

Obviously the issue of value is being considered. Donkeys value things that people consider rubbish. People value gold. A relationship is given between donkeys and people. Perhaps that relationship can be extended, with people taking the place of donkeys. A new statement comes to mind: 'Just as donkeys value rubbish while people value gold, people value gold while...'.

Heraclitus gives no candidate for the final member of the sequence—at least not in this saying. However light is shed by another aphorism that declares all things to be an exchange for fire, just as goods for gold, and gold for goods. Fire then must be the highest value compared to which gold, indeed all worldly wealth, is as rubbish.

Who prefers fire? Zeus? The highest people? The wise? All of these? Heraclitus' listeners are left to themselves to discover who prefers fire.

Meanwhile if the combined fragments show gold as rubbish they simultaneously show both gold and rubbish as disguised or fallen forms of the highest: gold is fire for people; rubbish is fire for donkeys. Such multilayered meaningfulness, particularly when related to a hidden dimension of ineffable oneness, is typical of magical thinking. Some readers of course will prefer the word 'mystical' in this context.

12. If diverse things are one they must have something in common. The 'common' is in fact how Heraclitus sometimes

6 To my knowledge the great Heraclitean interpreter Hermann Fränkel, 'A Thought Pattern in Heraclitus', *A/Ph* 59 (1938), 309ff, was the first to spell out 'the device of the double proportion' in the fragments.
designates the central reality: ‘Therefore the common should be followed. But in spite of the logos being common the many live as if they had intelligences of their own.’ (D 2)

At least two extraordinary conclusions are prompted by this text: first, that the common (here identified with the logos) is somehow linked with intelligence and, second, that intelligence fundamentally does not belong to individual human beings.

These conclusions actually turn out to be mild versions of Heraclitus’ position with regard to intelligence. A thorough study of the fragments shows that the common is not merely linked with intelligence: it is intelligence itself—a universal cognisance potentially accessible to every being and not only human beings (see the following fragment). At the same time careful examination of the texts affirms that intelligence is fundamentally not a lower-order trait or possession. Indeed it inhabits a sphere apart from all things even while providing a common basis for whatever intelligence or understanding is enjoyed here below.

For the moment the close connection between intelligence and the common can be seen in the fragment: ‘Thought is common to all.’ (D 113) The connection between intelligence and fire is supported by an aside from Hippolytus, one of the main preservers of Heraclitus. Commenting on the aphorism ‘The thunderbolt drives all things’ (D 64) he says: ‘by thunderbolt he means eternal fire; he says also that this fire is sagacious and cause of the management of the universe.’

13. It is best not to put rigid constructions on intelligence, thought, sagacity and management. What is principally meant is consciousness—or in terms more natural to Heraclitus, wakefulness. Seen in this light the identity of fire and intelligence is not all that strange. The image of everliving fire evokes nothing so much as an instant of awareness: the immediate past is extinguished and the immediate future is kindled in the everpresent moment of wakefulness. Specific contents of attention live and die, come and go, but the spirited and open character of attention itself is always the same. The lively, flowing, light-giving

7 Kirk, 349.
quality of fire makes it a natural correlate for immediate consciousness.

Normally of course awareness is considered to belong to individual persons, as a kind of possession that wears their stamp. Heraclitus appears to deny this, at least with respect to the highest and purest (i.e. most fiery) form of consciousness.

14. Despite the status of intelligence as something apart it nonetheless must participate in things generally—as the term ‘common’ implies. If all things draw their existence from a common fire and if a basic feature of that fire is intelligence or consciousness then consciousness must be universal. It must pertain to all beings, at least in so far as they are true to their nature.

That is the catch, for consciousness includes the possibility of its occlusion, not only in lower forms such as rocks and stones but in humans as well. Humans too, and perhaps especially, can become numb and blind. In other words it is possible for them to stray from the common and be aware without being really aware, awake but asleep, present but absent. People of whom this is true are presumably the same ones who fail to understand the logos, for they are ‘as unconscious of what they do while awake as they are forgetful of what they do while asleep.’ (D 1) They are the hordes of daylight sleeperwalkers who are ‘labourers and accomplices in what happens in the world.’ (D 75)

‘They hear but are deaf,’ Heraclitus complains. ‘The saying “absent but present” witnesses to them.’ (D 34) Their great failing is that they are ignorant of the divine flame even while partaking of it in their daily consciousness.

‘They tend away from that with which they are constantly connected’ (D 72) says the Heraclitus of Marcus Aurelius, who adds: ‘It is not fitting to act and speak like sleepers.’ (D 73)

15. Sextus Empiricus writes this curious introduction to a fragment (D 1) on the logos: ‘At the beginning of the writings on nature the aforementioned man, in some way indicating the
atmosphere, says. . . Here follows a lament by Heraclitus that no one understands the logos.

Curiously nowhere in the lament is there any mention of an atmosphere (or ‘environment’ as the word is sometimes translated) or indeed of anything vaguely resembling one. Sextus is perhaps reporting an understanding of Heraclitus that dates back to a time when other fragments were in existence or when there were ‘initiates’ with a fuller knowledge of the teaching than is plainly spelled out. In any case he appears to be grappling with an idea that is not his own.

He clarifies the meaning of ‘atmosphere’ in the following account:

The natural philosopher is of the opinion that what surrounds us is rational and endowed with consciousness. According to Herakleitos, when we draw in this divine reason by means of respiration, we become rational. In sleep we forget, but at our waking we become conscious once more. For in sleep, when the openings of the senses close, the mind which is in us is cut off from contact with that which surrounds us. . . When we awake again, however, it looks out through the openings of the senses as if through windows, and coming together with the surrounding mind, it assumes the power of reason. Just, then, as embers, when they are brought near the fire, change and become red-hot, and go out when they are taken away from it again, so does the portion of the surrounding mind which sojourns in the body become irrational when it is cut off, and so does it become of like nature to the whole when contact is established through the greatest number of openings.9

16. The word ‘reason’ betrays an infiltration of Stoic notions and probably should be replaced with ‘wisdom’ or ‘intelligence.’

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8 Kirk, 33.

The discussion of pores, openings and respiration also seems alien to Heraclitus. Though he does refer to nostrils in connection with perception (‘If all things became smoke the nostrils would differentiate them.’ D 7) the situation proposed by him is entirely fanciful and seems designed to make the point that distinctions prevail in every conceivable circumstance. The most plausible conclusion is that Sextus’ account gives a literal interpretation of something that was intended in a subtler sense.

If respiration is understood as a metaphor for participation in the common (a similar metaphor would apply to the fragment on nostrils) and if looking ‘out through the openings of the senses’ essentially means wakefulness, then the general thrust of Sextus’ account rings true to Heraclitus even though the exact figures of speech do not. Other aspects of the passage argue strongly in favour of an ultimate source in Heraclitus. References to wakefulness and sleep, the metaphor of embers drawing near to and away from a central fire—these have a distinctly Heraclitean flavour.

That still leaves the question of ‘atmosphere.’ What seems required is not the idea of air per se (which would be out of place in Heraclitus who appears not to give air a separate place among the elements) but the idea of a surrounding or enveloping region: a lively dimension that has the character of vastness and openness, a region where life shows itself truly, a domain of consciousness.

If that phrase seems too modern for the likes of Heraclitus it can be replaced with ‘the heavenly region’ or ‘the all-enfolding sky.’ For him these would still imply an over-arching intelligence or sky-like quality of mind to which people may or may not be party.

17. The idea of the common as a transpersonal region of wakefulness makes good sense in the overall teaching of Heraclitus. That he must have entertained some such notion is virtually guaranteed if the following fragment is genuine, as I believe it to be: ‘The waking have one world in common but the sleeping turn away, each to his own private land.’ (D 89) Since the word ‘world’ is suspect by some authorities a better rendering might be: ‘The waking have one land in common but the sleeping turn away, each to his own private land.’ In any case the idea of a
region is implied, as the modern philosopher Martin Heidegger seems to have realised early in his career.\textsuperscript{10}

The thought that informs the fragment is sharp and clear, as is the rationale for regarding intelligence as something that fundamentally does not belong to human beings. To the extent that individuals have intelligences of their own they withdraw their 'embers' from the universal fire and retreat to private lands. They are asleep, unconscious, dreaming.

Intelligence has its proper domain outside of human individuality. Though the notions of consensus and common sense cannot be equated with 'the common' of Heraclitus (in many respects they run counter to it) they nonetheless derive from a similar understanding. There can be arguments, doubts, conflicting points of view only in so far as people do not partake of a common consciousness. In the measure that they wake up and leave their private perspectives behind they share in a single domain. If points of view are left behind there remains only what is so. Private intelligence vanishes, replaced by common reality.

Though Heraclitus does not explicitly say so, the logical endpoint for full awakening is an intelligence that essentially belongs to no one and is not different from the fundamental reality of things. Sextus says: ‘Therefore in so far as we share in awareness of this, we speak the truth, but in so far as we remain independent of it we lie.’\textsuperscript{11}

18. I do not take the ordinary waking state as the region that Heraclitus has in mind. Doubtless it points in the right direction but most wakeful people do not experience things as being one in fire. This together with the fact that Heraclitus regards most people as sleepers even when they are formally awake suggests that he must be speaking of another level or another kind of waking: a higher and more vital consciousness that reveals a wholly new

\textsuperscript{10} I believe that it is impossible to overestimate the extent to which Heidegger’s thinking attempts to approximate the teaching of Heraclitus. The ‘common’ of the latter tends to become ‘the Open’ of the former. See especially Heidegger’s early essay ‘On the Essence of Truth.’

\textsuperscript{11} Kirk, 57.
Partial support is given by Heraclitus' apparent belief that at least some souls wake up and become one with fire in death. This almost certainly relates to the curious fragment: 'Things await men after death that they do not expect or conceive of.' (D 27) The implication seems to be that ultimate reality is very different from ordinary experience.

Another mysterious fragment says: 'They ascend into wakefulness to become guardians of the living and the dead.' (D 63) Apart from affirming that the fire-realm has a heavenly or sky-like significance and that it is related to a state of wakefulness the text intimates an extraordinary vision of reality. No hint is given as to the exact nature of the guardians or watchers—unless they are understood to belong to the golden race in Hesiod's poetry—but it is certain that they have a vantage point from which the living and the dead co-exist.

19. It seems necessary to suppose that the heavenly domain or fire-realm somehow interpenetrates the realm of formally differentiated reality and can therefore be known together with it. Indeed the very awareness that 'all things are one' implies a simultaneous knowledge of oneness and diversity. That some such consciousness applies to the guardians is guaranteed by their very roles as guardians: they can be protectors of the souls below only if the latter are somehow still present to them. The guardians know a world that is very different from that of ordinary experience but it must still be the world: the lower domain that is distinct from fire while nonetheless functioning as one with it.

Some readers might feel that the world of individual beings should fade away in proportion to fire's manifestness. However the combined texts suggest that it persists even while showing itself to be secondary and ephemeral.

20. 'If all things became smoke the nostrils would differentiate them.' (D 7) This (already-cited) fragment seems nonsense if taken at face value and in isolation. Taken poetically and in the context of the other sayings it begins to yield meaning.
Smoke is directly related to fire and distantly partakes of its nature: it is dry, warm, insubstantial and so on. Unlike the latter however it regularly becomes all-enveloping and obliterating. A uniform haze obscures individual differences. A single aspect dominates the perceptual field. In this respect smoke is a better symbol of unity than fire itself: it forces the notion of an all-encompassing oneness upon us. Yet Heraclitus insists that even within such a medium distinctions would be made, namely by way of the nostrils.12

The assertion could be a comment on the perversity of human nature—that it insists on clinging to differences—but is more probably an observation about nature in general. Heraclitus’ point seems to be that there is always some awareness of distinctions, regardless of perspective.

This agrees with the overall sweep of his thinking as well as with another enigmatic saying that goes: ‘In Hades souls sense things by smelling.’ (D 98) The reference to smelling almost certainly links the fragment to the one just considered. If Heraclitus takes Hades as a correlate of the divine, as does Plato in Phaedo 80d-81a, then it is likely that the original context of the Hades fragment is the persistence of distinctions even with respect to those who inhabit the highest sphere. If Hades refers to the lowest sphere—to the realm of the merely dead, as I suspect it does—then it is still possible that distinctions are universally apparent.

21. In spite of the pervasiveness of distinctions (and perhaps finally because of it) there remains a sense in which the fire-realm dwells apart from all things and is fundamentally untouched by them. In other words there is a distinction between the fire-realm proper, where the truth of absolute unity prevails, and fire in its guise as the worldly round, where multiplicity is the rule. These two co-exist and are ultimately one; nonetheless fire in its purest form is undivided.

Here is where so many interpretations of Heraclitus run into insoluble difficulties. It appears that a kind of many-layered

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12 See Kirk, 235.
consciousness pertains to those who enjoy the fiery perspective. Such souls (if the plural can be used any more) are simultaneously present to at least two realms: they know a realm of unity untouched by multiplicity and a realm of distinctions that is illumined by unity's truth.

How can such a situation be adequately conceived? Perhaps it cannot be. Perhaps conceptual clarity must give way to a different kind of understanding, a wisdom that rests beyond every 'yes' and 'no'. In perceiving a multitude of differences such insight would also perceive that they finally make no difference in light of what is 'everliving' and 'one'. Perhaps that wisdom is the chief meaning of the logos.

22. All that has been said of wakefulness and the common applies to wisdom. Wisdom (or the wise) is 'one' (D 32) and therefore identical with the other central terms employed by Heraclitus. As in those cases the unity in question is and is not the same as 'all things'. In itself wisdom is separate from everything, including human understanding (unless that partakes of the common): 'Of all whose accounts I have heard none arrives at the realisation that wisdom is apart from all.' (D 108)

Not surprisingly wisdom (or the wise) can be equated with divinity: 'Wisdom is one alone, unwilling and willing to be named Zeus.' (D 32) In this connection the point is again made that humankind falls short of true intelligence: 'Human nature has no understanding but divine nature has.' (D 78) Meanwhile the identity of wisdom and the logos is implied in: 'Wisdom is one: realising how all things are steered through all.' (D 41)

23. Granted that the unity of the one and the many may be beyond precise elucidation it is still worthwhile looking for attempts at conceptual clarity in Heraclitus. How does he depict the relation between unity and multiplicity? How is what is 'apart from all' related to 'all things'? Can it be related to them at all? What is the precise dynamic between the fire-realm and the everyday order?

A particularly intriguing fragment reads: 'Exchanges for fire: first sea; and half of sea is earth, half fire-storm.' (D 31a) A similar but somewhat doubtful fragment (owing to the inclusion of air)
goes: ‘Fire’s death is air’s birth, and air’s death is water’s birth.’ (D 71) To make a full circuit the pattern would continue down through earth and back up again to fire. Water is the predominant element in the more reliable fragment, half of it changing to earth and half of it returning to heaven in the form of a fire-storm.

The third century AD biographer Diogenes Laertius writes: ‘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 the earth dissolves, and water comes into being from it, and everything else from water. . . this is the path upwards.’ (The reference is to the fragment: ‘The path up and the path down are one and the same.’ D 60)

A circulation process seems entailed, a conclusion that is vaguely supported by the saying: ‘A circle’s beginning and end are common.’ (D 103) It is also supported by an otherwise hard-to-explain text that goes: ‘The holy barley drink separates unless stirred.’ (D 125)

It certainly looks as though Heraclitus conceives the relation between divine fire and ‘all things’ in terms of a primitive material circulation. If the fire-realm is associated with the sky then the world below it can be thought of as originating in a kind of precipitation like rain, if not in fact rain. The lower order begins as water, somehow condenses into earth, then in time returns to water before ascending back to heaven through evaporation. Nothing could be more straight-forward to the primitive mind reflecting on atmospheric phenomena. But what has all this to do with wakefulness or consciousness? And is Heraclitus a primitive thinker?

24. After the amazing subtlety of the thoughts presented so far the prospect of a cosmology based on a more or less mechanical circulation of divine fire comes as a let-down. Even if the question of consciousness is put aside and circulation is considered in purely material terms, the central idea is unsatisfactory since the actual processes remain arcane and profoundly unmechanical. How does fire suddenly appear as water, water as earth, and so on?

Barnes, 107.
Philosophically and aesthetically the theory seems exceedingly crude. Apparently the fire-region draws its life from the inferior domain, from its own dregs. Most subsequent thinkers would agree that the superior order should remain wholly elevated and fundamentally ‘apart from all’—as Heraclitus himself insists in another fragment. As matters stand there is little reason whatever for singling out fire since it is only another position on the circle’s rim. Water has the greater claim to centrality since it is the mediator between heaven and earth, forming two sides of the clumsy wheel.

But is it clear that Heraclitus has a material circulation in mind? Fire has already been shown to be identical with wakefulness or intelligence. Texts soon to be examined suggest that the circulation model is used principally in relation to souls and that an inward or psychological context for fire, water and earth is presupposed. If so the circulation theory essentially says only that the death of the fire mentality is the birth of the water mentality and so on, with each state generating its peculiar experience of the world. A pronounced inward transition is required to move from one realm to the next, a radical state-change or a marked shift in perspective.\(^\text{14}\) I suggest that Heraclitus has taken a primitive cosmology popular in his time and employed it as a metaphor for a more subtle type of circulation in which fire has priority as the original and proper state of the soul.

25. Here is another fragment on the theme of circulation: ‘For souls it is death to be born as water, for water it is death to be born as earth; from earth water comes forth, from water soul.’ (D 36)

The text virtually guarantees an inward or psychological significance for circulation. Interestingly Clement who records the saying attributes the thought originally to Orpheus, owing to a virtually identical passage in Orphic verse that goes: ‘from earth again comes water; from that comes soul, leaping up to the whole aither.’\(^\text{15}\) If anything of course the idea is stolen from Heraclitus whose sayings predate this verse.

\(^{14}\) In relation to the exchanges of fire Kirk says: “’one’ and “many” are alternative ways of looking at things, not successive physical states...‘, 347.
In any case it is clear that soul occupies the place allotted to fire in the circulation fragment cited above. Apparently soul is yet another correlate of divine fire, specifically when soul is manifest in its pure state. That would accord with the text: ‘Wisest and best is the dry soul, a flash of light.’ (D 118) The ultimate identity of soul with the divine sphere is suggested by a fragment that (perhaps recalling Anaximander’s notion of the ‘Boundless’) says: ‘You will not find the limit of the soul by following every road, so deep is its logos.’ (D 45)

26. It seems reasonable to suppose that all souls originate in and devolve back to a single undifferentiated soul or spirit, and indeed the preceding fragment appears to refer to just such a spirit. However in light of the fragment about those who ascend into wakefulness to become guardians of the living and the dead, as well as the fragment asserting that it is death for ‘souls’ to become water, it is possible that souls retain some measure of independence even while sharing a fiery essence in what is and is not willing to be called Zeus. Perhaps certain noble souls ascend to an ethereal station within the realm of distinctions—while inwardly or more essentially dwelling beyond such distinctions. All that can be said is that some texts intimate a single soul within the highest sphere while others imply that many souls have access to it. Once again the situation calls for a both-and (rather than an either-or) solution since it is entirely appropriate in the context of Heraclitus for the highest souls to recognise that they are ultimately one.

In any event there is a fall from the heavenly estate as soon as the water perspective dominates. This happens when fire degenerates into passion: ‘It is hard to battle passion, what it wants it buys at the soul’s cost.’ (D 85) The battle is difficult because: ‘It is pleasure though death for souls to get wet.’ (D 36) Another saying seems to offer a metaphor for this: ‘A drunken man is led by a beardless boy, tripping, not knowing where he is going, because his soul is wet.’ (D 117)

15 Kirk, 339.

16 Burnet notes that ‘The gratification of desire implies the exchange of dry soul-fire for moisture.’ See 140.
In these fragments water is plainly a psychological state, a condition of abandonment to low desire. Doubtless there is a perception of 'reality' that corresponds with the watery psyche (Empedocles who dates from roughly the same era says 'Insofar as they become different, to that extent always does their thought too present different objects.') but water is primarily a disorganised and uncollected frame of mind that is oblivious of the divine sphere. It is a kind of sleep, a chaotic dreaming.

No precise indication is given of what a further descent—into the earthy mentality—entails but enough has been provided to form an enlightened appraisal of circulation as a whole. Fire primarily circulates in the form of souls and not in the form of worldly substance. What today is called 'matter' is in Heraclitus an epiphenomenon of spirit, not the reverse as science maintains.

Essentially there is only divine fire. But souls have the possibility of entering a distorted principle of fire, a degraded logos where fire is somehow translated into passion or desire. In that very same stroke there appears a world of graspable entities that do not attest to their participation in fire. This degraded vision becomes the everyday round which persists until souls are illumined in the midst of their watery sojourn or until they rejoin fire in death.

I assume that what takes place in a soul's descent is that it loses cognisance of its true nature until attention is returned to the bright and familiar heartland of being. I submit that this internal version of circulation has more support in the fragments than its mechanical counterpart. If something like soul-circulation is taken as a central idea, the sayings make good sense as whole. If the centrality of soul-circulation is denied (on what grounds?) what remains is a primitive philosophy that consistently oversteps itself, making better sense as a sophisticated doctrine than as the comparatively humble teaching it is supposed to be.

27. 'All things are a trade for fire, and fire for all things, just as goods for gold and gold for goods.' This saying can now be interpreted: 'All things are a trade for soul, and soul for all things,

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17 Barnes, 191.
just as goods for gold and gold for goods.' Texts that appear to describe a purely material circulation really characterise the soul's experience as it undergoes various transformations that distort or occlude its fiery essence.

Though Heraclitus suggests that a soul forfeits its soulful nature as soon as it becomes water I take this to mean that it goes into hiding rather than ceases to exist. If a 'dry soul' is best there must also be a possibility of a wet soul and an earthy soul. Essentially soul remains soul in whatever form; it retains its fiery essence even though this may be twisted beyond recognition. That the soul-element is a constant agrees with the enigmatic saying: 'And the same thing in us is living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old, with the former shifting to the latter and the latter to the former.' (D 88) This in turn is apparently related to another fragment that goes: 'Immortals are mortals, mortals immortals: living death, dying life.' (D 62)

28. In all I assume that when Heraclitus says 'soul' he also means self, self-feeling or self-awareness (not identical with personality or individuality) whose true nature is fiery and wakeful. I take it that soul is the central reference of the saying: 'I have searched for my self.' (D 101) The emphasis on self-knowledge strongly suggests that Heraclitus stands in definite relation to the Socratists, hermetics and gnostics who come after him, including alchemists like Thomas Vaughan who frankly acknowledges a heavy debt to early Greek philosophy.

29. As a matter of sheer speculation I suggest that by 'earth' Heraclitus means the realm of the merely dead, which he equates with Hades and the absolute limit of sleep. A spectrum of wakefulness is indicated in which fire represents the heights of awareness, water the everyday mixture of waking and sleeping and earth the ultimate in sleep which is death in the mundane sense (i.e. the condition of those who do not 'ascend into wakefulness' at the end of their lives).

'A man strikes a light for himself at night when his sight is dim. Alive but asleep he draws near the dead; awake he draws near the sleeping.' (D 26) The apparently corrupt text suggests that sleep borders death as ordinary waking borders sleep. From another
angle sleep borders ordinary waking while this in turn borders a higher wakefulness not mentioned in the text save for the glancing reference to fire.

30. Circulation is plainly related to becoming or change, the theme with which Heraclitus is most often associated. A fragment that is often cited in this context is: ‘We do and do not step into the same river(s); we are and are not.’ (D 49a) A related fragment says: ‘They step into the same river but different and still different waters flow there.’ (D 12) It seems likely that both fragments refer to a more original statement whose precise wording is lost. All that may be reliably guessed is that Heraclitus wished to contrast sameness (or oneness) with the appearance of constant change.

Whatever its exact meaning the river image seems especially apt in the context of a continual flux, not only because water can be associated with incessant movement but because the site of passing events must be life’s inferior regions where water has a central place. If fire proper is ever the same then formal change can refer only to what occurs (or appears to occur) here below, which is to say that time in the sense of progression enters the picture only where fire’s manifestness leaves off. Thereafter being degenerates into a constant becoming that does not arrive at an end, does not come to rest in completion until there is a return to the fiery perspective.

There is much to recommend this interpretation of the river. However the central idea of a river resides less in the notion of fluidity or change than in the notion of a path or course whose complex activities form a single entity constant through time. In other words the river’s primary significance resides in its sameness even though that sameness includes continual change. On that basis the river is a better symbol for circulation as a whole (including circulation’s source and final destination in fire) than it is for the watery realm by itself. It is an almost made-to-order symbol for the unity of sameness and change, oneness and difference, fire and fire. I submit that what is required to make sense of the river image is a vision of the whole in which what is ever the same is nonetheless forever changing: ‘It scatters and gathers; it unites and disperses; it approaches and recedes.’ (D 91)
31. ‘They do not see how what opposes itself agrees with itself; there is concordance in what bends back on itself, like the bow and the lyre.’ (D 51)

‘God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, fullness and want, but undergoes alteration, just as olive oil when mixed with fragrances is named according to the scent of each.’ (D 67)

‘By changing it rests.’ (D 84a)

In these and similar fragments a dynamic unity-in-opposition is intimated. To the watery soul all things seem to be at odds. But to the fire-illumined soul all things are one. Well in advance of the Christian mystics Heraclitus announces the coincidence of opposites in the divine.

32. The lengthy discussion of circulation culminating in the image of the river provides at least some conceptual clarity about the relation between unity and diversity in Heraclitus. Yet it explains surprising little about that soulful region or state of mind that is ‘one alone’ and ‘apart from all’. Most people are very familiar with relationship, dependence, mortality and difference but they are usually adrift when it comes to what is solitary, independent, everliving and always the same. Moreover it seems impossible to build any clear connections between these seemingly antagonistic spheres.

For his part Heraclitus seems confident of his understanding of the divine. Again and again he affirms its constancy, independence and self-sufficiency. Contrary to the opinion of experts like Kirk the fire-realm does not depend on the lower order for its continued existence. ‘The soul has a self-productive logos.’ (D 115) In other words it contains its own principle of generation. Its existence does not require a recycling of energy lost to the lower sphere. It magically gives birth to itself. That is the secret of fire's everliving emergence, its forever coming-to-be—of which all lower order being and becoming are derivative.¹⁸

¹⁸ The being of the fire-realm does not have the static character of being in later philosophy. It is ‘everliving’ in a dynamic sense, which is to say that it does not stand opposed to becoming but shares something of the latter’s nature: it is the constant coming-to-be of what is ever the same. Some
With characteristic insight Heidegger observes that the fragment ‘How is it possible to hide from what never sets?’ (D 16) necessarily implies something that is forever rising. Presumably the same inward sun is referred to in the saying: ‘The sun is new every day.’ (D 6)

But how can such self-sufficiency be reconciled with a schema involving continuous circulation? Why is a lower order necessary in any case? It cannot answer any lack in the original sphere. Is it an overflow or spillage, a completely gratuitous product of the divine? Is some such freedom from conventional reason implied in ‘Time is a child at play, moving pieces in a board-game.’? (D 52)

I suspect that these and many other questions cannot be resolved by conceptual frameworks including the model of circulation offered by Heraclitus himself. Resolution depends solely on achieving the fiery perspective and participating in its logos. Meanwhile the fragment about hiding from what never sets intimates that people already do understand these matters but for some reason flee that understanding. I propose that flight consists largely in a substitution of logical necessity for the indwelling logos and an insufficient appreciation of moments of being in which differences are observed as real yet seen not to make a real difference.

33. Does the teaching of Heraclitus offer anything like a practical approach to the fiery perspective? If a clear-cut programme is sought the answer must be no. The existing fragments spell out no simple recipe for returning to fire.

Many specific practices can be inferred. If hidden connections are better than obvious ones followers of Heraclitus will not go astray in looking for hidden connections in their experience. Similarly they will do well to avoid getting ‘wet’ (surrendering to passion) and so on. Nonetheless there appears to be no key

authorities suppose that this mixture of notions is indicative of a primitive and imprecise type of thinking. However Heraclitus was sufficiently precise in his thinking to formulate statements like ‘By changing it rests.’ I suspect that he was quite clear about the distinction between being and becoming but felt that it applied only to the lower realms.

instruction—at least none that is plainly identified as such—for regaining the divine sphere.

In the absence of such a key instruction I will propose one based on the fragment: ‘They ascend into wakefulness to become guardians of the living and the dead.’ The key is: ‘Ascend into wakefulness.’

In this case ascension means more than getting out of bed. Ordinary wakefulness is a kind of sleep as far as Heraclitus is concerned. Nonetheless a positive direction is given through the example of ordinary wakefulness. To wake up is to come to life, to enter a sphere of openness and light. Perhaps it is possible to go further in this direction. Having woken in the usual sense we can perhaps wake up yet again, thereby entering a sphere of even greater vitality, openness and light.

34. The criteria for true wakefulness are carefully spelled out by Heraclitus. Genuine waking should have a fiery and everliving character that evokes the inmost sense of life. It should reveal the essence of value. It should vouchsafe the essential unity of things. It should show the oneness of being and becoming. It should intimate a principle of self-growth. It should have a skylike quality that justifies the feeling of ascension. It should partake of wisdom and divinity. It should reveal a dimension that is in some sense apart from all things even while generating and participating in them. And it should disclose the essential soul or self. If waking falls short of these criteria it is necessary to wake up again.

35. My feeling is that the most useful indication (after the identification of ‘soul’ or ‘self’ as the essential domain in question) is given by the words ‘wisdom is apart from all.’ What is wanted is an awakening beyond all things. A hidden dimension is implied. Until there is an awakening to this hidden dimension (essentially a discovery of what is nearest and dearest but long forgotten) there is total submersion in the lower order.

Light breaks in a place apart from all things, in a hidden region that is the most intimate domain of self or soul, notwithstanding which it is open, light-filled and vastly deep, a great fiery sky that enfolds all things. Waking up consists in returning to this hidden dimension: ‘The true nature of things likes to hide.’ (D 123)
36. The preceding discussion has made no attempt to gloss over the tensions and apparent contradictions in Heraclitus' thinking. They have been accentuated rather than dispelled and are submitted as integral features of his philosophy. In all I feel I have correctly identified the central problems that concern this great thinker. Interestingly they are among the same problems that concern philosophers to this day. At the same time I feel I have correctly shown Heraclitus' recipe for the resolution of such perennial questions: ascension to a higher sphere.

The heights of waking reveal a dimension of sheer value and pristine meaning. Though complete in itself and apart from all things it generates a world of manifold appearances and supplies it with an underlying context of wholeness and constancy. Where the primordial sphere is dimmed or forgotten a shadow-logos comes into play informing all things with a sense of lack. That sense of lack manifests primarily as desire directed toward and against the various elements of experience—as if they could somehow restore or withhold what is missing. The everyday experience of life as a kind of warfare ensues, with death and decay taking the upper hand. Awakening from the nightmare awaits a rediscovery of soul as the determining factor in whatever experience. To individual souls belongs the power of rising and setting. If souls rise they return to the greater logos and shed light on the world like the sun. If they set they retreat to dark and private lands. What is wanted is a return to secret fire.

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