The verses of Heraclitus of Ephesus

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*Kahn suggests that the surviving fragments may well represent most of the original. This observation has inspired the tentative reconstruction offered here.*

*All authentic quotations from Heraclitus (fl. 500 BC) are included in the following text; material shown in square brackets on the English side has been added by the editor; and some small fragments and guesses in Marcovich's edition have been added in brackets to the Greek. Marcovich has pointed out by implication that Heraclitus wrote in free verse rather than straight prose.*

*Heraclitus' words are of legendary opacity, and all of the fragments can be translated in many ways: the translation given here is partly new. The numbers are references to the fragments in Kahn's translation. The ordering of the fragments, apart from the opening paragraph, is of course conjectural: the relationship of the ordering given here with other translations is shown in the appendix.*

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| ****’ς       ς                    | Although this account holds forever men fail to comprehend it, both before they hear it and when they first hear. Even though all happenings are in accordance with this account, people behave like the unlearned when they experience works and words; whereas I set them forth, distinguishing everything according to its nature and telling how it is. But then most people are as unconscious of what they do awake as they are forgetful of what they do asleep: |
|        | Failing to comprehend after hearing, they learn like the deaf: the saying is their witness, absent while present. |
| ’     | Although this account is shared, the many live as though thinking things out were a private matter. |
|        | [Contrary to Archilochus], the many do not think about things the way they find them, and do not gain understanding from their own experiences, but simply believe their own opinions. |
|    | Gaining learning from what we see and hear: this I do prefer. |
|      | But eyes and ears are bad witnesses for men with barbaric minds: |
| ’       | not knowing how to listen, neither can they speak. They are at odds with what they have most continuous involvement: |
|        | as they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow over them. |
|    | They fail to recognise how things can diverge while being brought together; it is a harmony that changes back, like that of the bow and the lyre. |
|      | The sea is the purest and the foulest water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly. |
|    | The path of the carding wheel is straight and crooked. |
|  | The way uphill and downhill is the same. |
|    | Harmonies that are hidden are more powerful than those that are obvious. |
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| ****     | Much learning does not teach common sense, for they would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and also Xenophanes and Hecataeus. |
|    | Bias son of Teutames who lived in Priene. He is of more account than the rest: |
|    | *The many are worthless, good men are few.* |
|    | *One is ten thousand if he is the best.* |
|    | The esteemed man merely estimates; but maintains he understands. |
|    | Only dogs bark at what they do not understand: |
|    | A fool loves to get excited at any new teaching. |
|        | What wit or thinking do they have? They believe the popular poets and take the mob for their teacher, not knowing that “The many are worthless”. |
|      | The best choose one thing in exchange for all, everflowing fame among mortals; but most men have sated themselves like cattle. |
|             ’ | The Ephesians deserve to be hanged to the last man, every one of them, and leave the city to the boys, since they drove out their most successful man, Hermodorus, saying “Let no one be the most successful among us; if he is, let him be so elsewhere and among others”[If they hold to the principle, they will empty the city.] |
|   ’ | May wealth never fail you, men of Ephesus, so that your wickedness be proved! |
|     ****           | Men deceive themselves in their knowledge of the obvious, even Homer the [blind] astronomer, considered wisest of all Greeks. For he [died of grief over a riddle when he] was fooled by boys killing lice who said: what we see and catch we leave behind; and what we neither see nor catch we carry away. |
|     | He deserves to be expelled from the contest and beaten with the same staff as Archilochus. |
| ****       | For most people, Hesiod is the teacher: they know him as knowing most, though he did not understand day and night: they are one:[as days lengthen, the nights shorten in equal measure]. |
| ****           | Pythagoras son of Mnesarchus pursued inquiry further than all other men, but choosing only what he liked from these compositions, made a wisdom of his own: much learning, artful knavery. |
|  | That prince of impostors! |
| ****   | The Sybil with raving mouth utters things mirthless. |
|    | The lord [Apollo] whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign. |
|      | Of all those whose accounts I have heard, none has gone so far as this, to understand what is wise, set apart from all things. |
|    | It belongs to all men to know themselves and to think things out; |
|    | careful inquirers into a great many things: |
|  | I went on my own search. |
| ****   | Thinking things out is the greatest excellence and wisdom: to act and speak what is true, perceiving things according to their nature. |
|      | seekers of gold must dig up much earth and find little. |
|  | for things love to hide their nature |
|      | He who does not search the unsearchable will not find ways in what is trackless and unsolved. |
|  | What cannot be known escapes understanding: |
|  | What we do not know, we should conceal our ignorance; |
|  | Thinking things out is shared by all. |
|                | Speaking with understanding they must hold fast to what is shared by all, as a city holds to its law, and even more firmly. For all human laws are nourished by one law, a divine one. It prevails as it will and suffices for all and is more than enough. |
|     | The people must fight for the law as for their city wall |
|  | Crime must be extinguished faster than a blazing fire. |
| ****    | Man's nature, his spirit, has no set purpose, but the divine has. |
| ****     | The sun will not transgress his measures. (If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice, will find him out.) |
| 42a | Seasons which bring all to birth, |
|   | thirty years for a generation, [and 10800 for the great year.] |
|    κ | The limits of Dawn and Evening is the Bear; and opposite the Bear, the Warder of bright Zeus [is the star Arcturus]. |
|        | If there were no sun, for all the stars, it would still be night. |
| ’48a | The sun is new every morning, |
|      | [But] how will one hide from that which never sets? |
| ****   | The wise is one, knowing the plan by which all things are steered through all. |
|  | It is law also to obey the counsel of one. |
|        | For god all things are fair and just, but men have taken some things as unjust, others as just. |
|  | If it were not for these things, they would not have known the name of Justice. |
|  | Justice will catch up with those who invent lies and those who swear to them. |
| ****            ’ | War is father and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free. |
|     ’ | One must realise that war is shared and conflict is justice, and that all things come to pass in accordance with conflict. |
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| ****’   | The mysteries current among men initiate them into impiety. |
| ’          ’        ’ | They are purified in vain with blood, those polluted with blood, as if someone who stepped in mud should try to wash himself with mud. Anyone who notices him doing this would think he was mad. And they pray to images as if they were chatting with houses, not understanding what gods or even heroes are like. |
|       ’      | If it were not Dionysus for whom they march in procession and chant the hymn to the genitals, their action would be most shameless, But Hades and Dionysus are the same, him for whom they rave and celebrate the festival of Lenaia. |
| ****   | The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus. |
| ****              ’ | The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes, and gets named by each according to his wish. |
| ****    ’  ********   | The cosmic order has been made by no god or man, but has always been and always will be: fire everliving, for ever breaking out here and dying out there. |
|    | A breaking fire will pick out and catch up with all things, |
|  | hunger and satiety, |
|  | it rests by changing. |
|         | All things are a payment for fire, and fire for all things, as goods for gold and gold for goods. |
|    | Listening not to me but to the argument, it is wise to agree rather that all things are one. |
| ****     | The changes of fire: first sea; but of sea half is earth, half lightning storm. |
|      | The sea dissolves, and measures up to the same amount as was there before it became earth. |
|    | The death of fire is birth for air, and the death of air is birth for water. |
|        | Cold warms up, warmth cools down, wetness dries up, dryness becomes damp. |
|    | A man is considered foolish by a god, as a child by a man. |
|  | All beasts are driven to pasture by blows: |
|  | the thunderbolt of heavenly fire pilots all things. |
|  | Swine delight in mire more than clean water, |
| ’ | Asses prefer garbage to gold, |
|  | Cattle delight in bitter vetch rather than honey, |
|    | The fairest order in the world is a heap of random sweepings. |
|  |  |
| ****     | Doctors cut and burn, complain that they receive no worthy fee for the same effects as the diseases! |
|       67b | It is disease that makes health sweet and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest. |
| ****     | You will not find the limits of the mind, even if you travel over every road, so deep is its argument. |
|  | A dry mind, the wisest and best. |
|         | When drunk, a grown man is led by a beardless boy, stumbling, not knowing where he is going, his mind is wet. |
|        | For the mind it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; out of earth water springs, out of water the mind. |
|    | It is hard to fight against the heart’s desire; for whatever it wants it gets and the mind loses. |
| 67a | [It is said: the sweetest thing is to get your desire, but] it is not better for human beings to get all they want. |
| ****       | A man strikes a light for himself in the night, when his sight is put out. Living, he touches the dead in his sleep; waking, he touches the sleeper. |
| ****     | Death is all things we see awake; all we see asleep is sleep. |
| ****’           | The same: living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old. For these transposed are those, and those transposed are these. |
|    | What awaits men at death they do not expect or even imagine. |
|          | Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others’ death, dead in the others’ life. Corpses should be thrown out quicker than dung. |
|    | Greater deaths are allotted greater fates: |
|  | gods and men honour those who fall in battle. |
|     ’     | Once born they want to live and have their fates; and they leave children behind born to become their fates, |
| ’   | rising up to become wakeful watchers of living men and corpses; |
| ’ | their souls smell [blood, of offerings] in Hades: |
|    | if all turned to smoke, the nostrils would sort them out. |
| ****   | Lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces in a game. Kingship belongs to the child. |
|    | The bow has the name *bios*, life; its work is death. |
|  | Shared are the beginning and end around a circle. |
| ****           | Concepts: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things a unity and from this unity all things [are made]. |

## Appendix

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Kahn** | **Russos** | **Diels-Kranz** | **Marcovich** | **Bywater** | **Schleiermacher** |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 47 |
| 2 | 2 | 34 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 25 | 2 | 23b | 92 | 48 |
| 4 | 3 | 17 | 3 | 5 | 2 |
| 14 | 5 | 55 | 5 | 13 |  |
| 16 | 7 | 107 | 13 | 4 | 22 |
| 17 |  | 19 | 1g | 90 | p.520 |
| 5 | 4 | 72 | 4 | 93 |  |
| 50 | 41 | 12 | 40a | 42 | 21 |
| 78 | 28 | 51 | 27 | 45 | 27 |
| 70 | 37 | 61 | 35 | 52 |  |
| 74 | 34 | 59 | 32 | 50 |  |
| 103 | 35 | 60 | 33 | 69 | 28 |
| 80 | 29 | 54 | 9 | 47 | 36 |
| 18 | 18 | 40 | 16 | 16 | 13 |
| 62 | 99 | 39 | 100 | 112 | 15 |
| 59 | 100 | 104 | 101 | 111a | 71 |
| 63 | 96 | 49 | 98 | 113 |  |
| 85 | 23 | 28a | 20 | 118a | 8a |
| 61 | 10 | 97 | 22 | 115 | 5 |
| 60 | 11 | 87 | 109 | 117 | 68 |
| 97 | 93 | 29 | 95 | 111b | 71 |
| 64 | 104 | 121 | 105 | 114 | 46 |
|  | 105 | 125a | 106 |  |  |
| 22 | 8 | 56 | 21 | 47a |  |
| 23 |  | 105 | 63a | 119n | p.345 |
| 21 | 21 | 42 | 30 | 119 | p.345 |
| 19 | 45 | 57 | 43 | 35 |  |
| 25 | 19 | 129 | 17 | 17 | 14 |
| 26 | 20 | 81 | 18 | 138 |  |
| 34 |  | 92 | 75 | 12 | 9 |
| 33 | 15 | 93 | 14 | 11 | 10 |
| 27 | 84 | 108 | 83 | 65 | 11 |
| 29 |  | 116 | 15f=23e | 106 | p.520 |
| 9 | 17 | 35 | 7 | 49 |  |
| 28 | 16 | 101 | 15 | 80 | 73 |
| 32 |  | 112 | 23f | 107 | p.479 |
| 8 | 12 | 22 | 10 | 115 | 5 |
| 10 | 30 | 123 | 8 | 10 |  |
| 7 | 13 | 18 | 11 | 7 | 6 |
| 86 | 14 | 86 | 12 | 116 | 12 |
| 107 | 9 | 95 | 110a3 | 108 | 1 |
| 31 |  | 113 | 23d | 91a | p.478 |
| 30 | 24 | 114 | 23a | 91b | 18 |
| 65 | 102 | 44 | 103 | 100 | 19 |
| 104 | 101 | 43 | 102 | 103 | 16 |
| 114 | 92 | 119 | 94 | 121 | 57 |
| 55 | 87 | 78 | 90 | 96 | 66 |
| 44 | 65 | 94 | 52 | 29 | 30 |
| 42a | 67 | 100 | 64 | 34 | p.400 |
| 95 |  | A19 | 108b | 87-9 |  |
| 45 | 66 | 120 | 62 | 30 | 31 |
| 46 | 49 | 99 | 60 | 31 | 32 |
| 48a | 64 | 6 | 58a | 32 | 29 |
| 122 | 82 | 16 | 81 | 27 | 40 |
| 54 | 86 | 41 | 85 | 19 | 44 |
| 66 | 103 | 33 | 104 | 110 | 45 |
| 68 | 88 | 102 | 91 | 61 | p.409s |
| 69 | 48 | 23 | 45 | 60 | 69 |
| 87 | 22 | 28b | 19 | 118b | 8b |
| 83 | 33 | 53 | 29 | 44 | p.408a |
| 82 | 32 | 80 | 28 | 62 | 35 |
| 115 | 55 | 14 | 87 | 124,125 | p.525 |
| 117 | 54 | 5 | 86 | 130,126 |  |
| 116 | 56 | 15 | 50 | 127 | 70 |
| 118 | 85 | 32 | 84 | 65 | 11 |
| 123 | 57 | 67 | 77 | 36 |  |
| 37 | 58 | 30 | 51 | 20 | 25 |
| 121 | 83 | 66 | 82 | 26 |  |
| 120 |  | 65 | 79,55 | 28,24 | p.430 |
| 40 | 60 | 90 | 54 | 22 | 41 |
| 36 | 27 | 50 | 26 | 1 |  |
| 38 | 59a | 31a | 53a | 21 | 25 |
| 39 | 59b | 31b | 53b | 23 | 26 |
| 41 |  | 76 | 66e1 | 25 | p.372,376 |
| 49 | 68 | 126 | 42 | 39 |  |
| 57 | 89 | 79 | 92a | 97 | 67 |
| 76 | 81 | 11 | 80 | 55 | 37 |
| 119 | 80 | 64 | 79 | 28 |  |
| 72a | 38 | 13 | 36a1 | 54 |  |
| 71 | 39 | 9 | 37 | 51 |  |
|  |  | 4 | 38 |  |  |
| 125 |  | 124 | 107 |  |  |
| 73 | 50 | 58 | 46 | 57,58 |  |
| 67 | 74,47 | 110-111 | 71,44 | 104 | 39 |
| 35 | 70 | 45 | 67 | 71 |  |
| 109 | 71 | 118 | 68 | 74-76 | 60-62 |
| 106 | 72 | 117 | 69 | 73 | 59 |
| 102 | 69 | 36 | 66 | 68 | 49 |
| 105 | 73 | 85 | 70 | 105 | 58 |
| 90 | 52 | 26 | 48 | 77 | 64 |
| 89 | 53 | 21 | 49 | 64 | 42 |
| 93 | 44 | 88 | 41 | 78 | 38bis |
| 84 | 77 | 27 | 74 | 122 | 52 |
| 92 | 51 | 62 | 47 | 67 | 50,51 |
| 88 | 79 | 96 | 76 | 85 | 43 |
| 96 | 95 | 25 | 97 | 101 | 53 |
| 100 | 94 | 24 | 96 | 102 | 54 |
| 98 | 97 | 20 | 99 | 86 | 55 |
| 110 | 76 | 63 | 73 | 123 |  |
| 91 |  | 75 | 1h2 | 90 | p.520 |
| 112 | 31 | 7 | 78 | 37 | 24 |
| 94 | 90 | 52 | 93 | 79 |  |
| 79 | 40 | 48 | 39 | 66 | 56 |
| 124 | 26 | 10 | 25 | 59 | 37bis |

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Only Kahn, Marcovich, and Russos have been studied directly in creating the above version.

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