



Fragments

HERACLITUS

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Mouseia's complete Plain English edition, made independently and directly from the same 130 fragments. Words of the ancient authors who quote Heraclitus stand in round parentheses.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

Written c. 500 BCE · Philosophy

SOURCE

Original text from archive.org.

GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

Heraclitus' book is lost; each fragment survives only as a quotation, and where the quotation ends is sometimes uncertain. The text follows Diels's 1922 edition, read from the page scans; his doubtful and spurious fragments (126a–139) are not included.

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Fragments 1–10

- ¹ Although this account (the Logos) holds forever, people do not understand it, either before hearing it or when they first hear it. Everything happens according to the Logos, but they seem inexperienced even as they experience words and actions like those I explain, examining each thing according to its nature and saying how it is. Other people are unaware of what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do when asleep.
- ² So we must follow what is common, that is, what is shared. For what is shared is common. Although the Logos is common, most people live as if they had an understanding of their own.
- ³ (On the sun's size:) the width of a human foot.
- ⁴ (Heraclitus said that) if happiness were found in bodily pleasures, we would call cattle happy when they find bitter vetch to eat.
- ⁵ They try to purify themselves in vain by staining themselves with blood. It is as if someone stepped into mud and tried to wash himself clean with mud. Anyone who noticed him doing this would think he was mad. And they pray to these statues, as if someone were chatting with houses, without knowing at all who the gods or heroes are.
- ⁶ (The sun is not only, as Heraclitus says,) new each day (but is always and continuously new).
- ⁷ If everything that exists became smoke, noses could tell things apart.
- ⁸ What opposes also unites. The finest harmony comes from things that differ, and everything comes about through conflict.
- ⁹ Donkeys would choose sweepings rather than gold.

- ¹⁰ Connections: whole and not whole, coming together and pulling apart, in tune and out of tune; from all things, one, and from one, all things.

Fragments 11–20

- ¹¹ For every crawling creature is driven by a blow.
- ¹² Different waters keep flowing over those who step into the same rivers. Souls too rise as vapor from what is wet.
- ¹³ (For a refined person must not be dirty or grimy or) delight in mud.
- ¹⁴ Night wanderers, magicians, male worshippers of Dionysus, female worshippers of Dionysus, initiates. (He threatens these people with what comes after death; he foretells fire for them.) For people are initiated in an unholy way into the mysteries they customarily practice.
- ¹⁵ If they were not holding their procession for Dionysus and singing a hymn to genitals, what they did would be utterly shameless. But Hades is the same as Dionysus, for whom they go mad and perform their rites.
- ¹⁶ How could anyone hide from what never sets?
- ¹⁷ Most people do not understand the things they encounter. Even after learning about them, they do not know them, though they think they do.
- ¹⁸ Unless you expect the unexpected, you will not find it. It cannot be searched out, and there is no path to it.
- ¹⁹ They do not know how to listen or how to speak.
- ²⁰ Once born, they want to live and meet their deaths—or rather, to rest. They leave children behind to meet death in turn.

Fragments 21–30

- ²¹ Everything we see when awake is death; everything we see when asleep is sleep.
- ²² For people looking for gold dig up a lot of earth and find little.
- ²³ They would not know the name of Justice if these things did not exist.
- ²⁴ Gods and people honor those killed in battle.
- ²⁵ For greater deaths win greater shares.
- ²⁶ A person lights a light for himself at night, dead, [his sight extinguished], yet alive. In sleep he touches the dead, his sight extinguished; awake, he touches the sleeping.
- ²⁷ After death, people face things they do not expect or imagine.
- ²⁸ For the most respected person knows and guards what seems true. Yet Justice will catch those who make up lies and those who testify to them.
- ²⁹ For the best choose one thing over everything else: everlasting fame among mortals. But most people stuff themselves like cattle.
- ³⁰ No god or human made this world-order, the same for all. It always was, is, and will be ever-living fire, lighting up in measured amounts and going out in measured amounts.

Fragments 31–40

- ³¹ Fire's changes: first sea; of sea, half earth and half fiery whirlwind. (For he means that fire is changed by the Logos and god that govern everything, passing through air into moisture, which is like the seed of the world-order and which

he calls) sea. (From this, earth and sky and everything they contain come into being in turn. How it is taken back again and set on fire he makes clear in these words:) Sea spreads out and is measured in the same proportion as before it became earth.

- 32 The wise, the one and only, both refuses and accepts the name of Zeus.
- 33 Law also means obeying the will of one.
- 34 People who hear without understanding are like the deaf. The saying describes them: “Present, yet absent.”
- 35 For those who love wisdom must investigate a great many things.
- 36 For souls, becoming water is death. For water, becoming earth is death. But water comes from earth, and soul comes from water.
- 37 Pigs bathe in mud, barnyard birds in dust or ashes.
- 38 (Thales seems, to some people, to have been) the first to study the stars (... Heraclitus and Democritus also bear witness for him).
- 39 In Priene lived Bias, son of Teutamas. He had a greater reputation than the others.
- 40 Learning many things does not teach understanding. If it did, it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and also Xenophanes and Hecataeus.

Fragments 41–50

- 41 For the wise is one thing: to know the intelligence that steers everything through everything.
- 42 Homer (he said) deserved to be thrown out of the contests and beaten with a rod, and Archilochus deserved the same.

- ⁴³ We must put out arrogance more urgently than a raging fire.
- ⁴⁴ The people must fight for their law as they would for their city wall.
- ⁴⁵ You could not find the soul's limits on your travels, even if you traveled every road. Its Logos is so deep.
- ⁴⁶ Conceit (he said) is a sacred disease, and sight deceives.
- ⁴⁷ Let us not guess at random about the greatest matters.
- ⁴⁸ The bow's name also means "life," but its work is death.
- ⁴⁹ One person is worth ten thousand to me, if he is the best.
- ^{49a} We step and do not step into the same rivers. We are and are not.
- ⁵⁰ When you have listened not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one.

Fragments 51–60

- ⁵¹ They do not understand how something at odds with itself agrees with itself. It is a harmony that turns back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.
- ⁵² A lifetime is a child at play, moving pieces on a board. The kingship belongs to a child.
- ⁵³ War is the father of all and the king of all. It has shown some to be gods and others humans; it has made some slaves and others free.
- ⁵⁴ Hidden harmony is stronger than visible harmony.
- ⁵⁵ I prefer things that can be seen, heard, and learned.

- ⁵⁶ People are deceived (he says) in their knowledge of visible things, just as Homer was, the wisest of all the Greeks. Children killing lice tricked him by saying: “What we saw and caught, we leave behind. What we neither saw nor caught, we carry with us.”
- ⁵⁷ Hesiod is the teacher of most people. They are sure he knows the most, yet he did not understand day and night. For they are one.
- ⁵⁸ Good and evil [are one]. Doctors, at any rate, (Heraclitus says,) cut and burn all over, cruelly torturing the sick. They demand payment from the sick, though they deserve none, since they produce the same things (good things and diseases).
- ⁵⁹ In a cloth-cleaner’s workshop, the straight and crooked path (the tool called a screw in the workshop turns in a straight and crooked path, since it moves both upward and in a circle at once) is one (he says) and the same.
- ⁶⁰ The path up and the path down are one and the same.

Fragments 61–70

- ⁶¹ The sea is the purest and most polluted water. For fish it is drinkable and keeps them alive; for people it is undrinkable and deadly.
- ⁶² Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal: they live the others’ death and are dead in the others’ life.
- ⁶³ And they rise before the one who is there and become watchful guards of the living and the dead.
- ⁶⁴ The Thunderbolt steers everything.
- ⁶⁵ (He calls it) need and fullness.
- ⁶⁶ For when fire comes (he says), it will judge and seize everything.

- ⁶⁷ God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, fullness and hunger (all the opposites—this is the meaning). But he changes like fire: when it is mixed with incense, it gets its name from the pleasant scent of each kind.
- ^{67a} Just as a spider (he says) standing in the middle of its web feels at once when a fly breaks one of its threads, and quickly runs there as if distressed that the thread is no longer whole, so a person's soul, when some part of the body is injured, rushes there as if unable to bear the injury to the body, to which it is firmly joined in due proportion.
- ⁶⁸ (And for this reason they were rightly called) remedies (by Heraclitus, since they would cure terrible ills and make souls safe from the misfortunes of life).
- ⁶⁹ (So I distinguish two kinds of sacrifice. One kind is that) of completely purified people, such as might occur only rarely in the case of one person (as Heraclitus says) or a few easily counted people.
- ⁷⁰ (How much better, then, that Heraclitus regarded as) children's playthings (the opinions people hold).

Fragments 71–80

- ⁷¹ (We must also remember) the person who forgets where the road leads.
- ⁷² The Logos (which governs everything) is what they are always in closest contact with, yet they are at odds with it. And the things they meet every day seem strange to them.
- ⁷³ We must not act and speak like people asleep. (For even then we think we are acting and speaking.)
- ⁷⁴ (We must not act like) children of their parents (that is, simply following what has been handed down to us).

- 75 (I think Heraclitus means that people who are asleep are) workers (that is what he says) and fellow workers in what happens in the world-order.
- 76 Fire lives the death of earth, and air lives the death of fire. Water lives the death of air, and earth the death of water.
- 77 For souls (he said), it is pleasure or death to become wet.
- 78 For human character has no understanding, but divine character does.
- 79 A man is called childish by a divinity, just as a child is by a man.
- 80 We must know that war is common, that Justice is conflict, and that everything happens through conflict and necessity.

Fragments 81–90

- 81 (The orators' introductory teaching aims all its lessons at this and, according to Heraclitus,) is the ringleader of cheats.
- 82 The most beautiful ape is ugly compared with the human race.
- 83 The wisest human will seem like an ape compared with a god, in wisdom, beauty, and everything else.
- 84 It rests by changing (and) it is exhausting to work for the same people and be ruled by them.
- 85 It is hard to fight passion. It buys whatever it wants at the price of the soul.
- 86 It escapes recognition because of disbelief.
- 87 A stupid person tends to get worked up over every report.
- 88 The same thing is alive and dead, awake and asleep, young and old. For these change into those, and those change back into these.

- 89 Those who are awake have one common world-order (but each person asleep turns away into a private one).
- 90 All things are exchanged for fire, and fire for all things, just as goods are exchanged for gold and gold for goods.

Fragments 91–100

- 91 For you cannot step into the same river twice (or touch mortal substance twice in the same state; instead, because change is so swift and sudden) it scatters and gathers again (or rather, not again or later, but it comes together and falls away at the same time) and comes near and goes away.
- 92 The Sibyl, with her raving mouth (according to Heraclitus), utters words without laughter, decoration, or perfume (and reaches across a thousand years with her voice) because of the god.
- 93 The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither tells nor hides, but gives a sign.
- 94 For the sun will not go beyond its measures. If it does, the Furies, the helpers of Justice, will find it.
- 95 For it is better to hide ignorance (but that is hard when relaxing and drinking wine).
- 96 For corpses are more fit to be thrown out than dung.
- 97 For dogs bark at anyone they do not know.
- 98 Souls sense smells in Hades.
- 99 If there were no sun, it would be night, despite the other stars.
- 100 (The sun, as overseer and lookout, defines, regulates, reveals, and brings to light the changes and) seasons that bring all things.

Fragments 101–110

- 101 I searched for myself.
- 101a For eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.
- 102 To God, all things are beautiful, good, and just. But people have judged some things unjust and others just.
- 103 For the beginning and end are one common point on a circle's edge.
- 104 What understanding or sense do they have? They trust the people's singers and take the crowd as their teacher, not knowing that "most people are bad, and few are good."
- 105 (Heraclitus uses this line to call) an astronomer (Homer).
- 106 One day is equal to any other.
- 107 Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for people whose souls speak a foreign language.
- 108 Not one of those whose accounts I have heard has reached the point of knowing that the wise is separate from everything.
- 109 It is better to hide ignorance than to put it on display.
- 110 People are not better off getting everything they want.

Fragments 111–120

- 111 Illness makes health pleasant; evil makes good pleasant; hunger makes fullness pleasant; exhaustion makes rest pleasant.

- 112 Thinking well is the greatest virtue. Wisdom is telling the truth and acting according to nature, with understanding.
- 113 Thinking is common to everyone.
- 114 Those who speak with understanding must rely firmly on what is common to all, as a city relies on its law, and much more firmly than that. For all human laws are fed by one divine law. It rules as far as it wishes, is enough for all, and has more to spare.
- 115 The soul has a Logos that grows on its own.
- 116 All people can know themselves and think well.
- 117 When a man gets drunk, a boy who has not reached puberty leads him. He stumbles without knowing where he is going. His soul is wet.
- 118 A dry gleam is the wisest and best soul.
- 119 A person's character is their guiding spirit.
- 120 The limits of dawn and evening are the Bear and, opposite the Bear, the boundary of Zeus's clear sky.

Fragments 121–126

- 121 All adult Ephesians deserve to hang themselves and leave the city to the children. They expelled Hermodorus, the most useful man among them, saying: "Let none of us be the most useful. If anyone is, let him be so somewhere else and among other people."
- 122 Coming close.
- 123 Nature (according to Heraclitus) likes to hide.

- 124 The most beautiful world-order (Heraclitus says) is (like) sweepings scattered at random.
- 125 Even the mixed drink separates if it is not stirred.
- 125a May your wealth never run out (he said), Ephesians, so that you may be exposed as wrongdoers.
- 126 Cold things warm up, what is warm cools down, what is wet dries out, and what is dry grows damp.