

Fragments

ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ

Heraclitus
tr. John Burnet

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ΠΕΡΙ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ • On Nature

It is wise to hearken, not to me, but to my Word, and to confess that all things are one.

Though this Word (logos) is true evermore, yet men are as unable to understand it when they hear it for the first time as before they have heard it at all. For, though all things come to pass in accordance with this Word, men seem as if they had no experience of them, when they make trial of words and deeds such as I set forth, dividing each thing according to its kind and showing how it truly is. But other men know not what they are doing when awake, even as they forget what they do in sleep.

Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men if they have souls that understand not their language.

The many do not take heed of such things as those they meet with, nor do they mark them when they are taught, though they think they do.

If you do not expect the unexpected, you will not find it; for it is hard to be sought out and difficult.

Those who seek for gold dig up much earth and find a little.

Nature loves to hide.

The lord whose is the oracle at Delphi neither utters nor hides his meaning, but shows it by a sign.

The things that can be seen, heard, and learned are what I prize the most.

Of all whose discourses I have heard, there is not one who attains to understanding that wisdom is apart from all.

Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things are steered through all things.

This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be an ever-living Fire, with measures of it kindling, and measures going out.

The transformations of Fire are, first of all, sea; and half of the sea is earth, half whirlwind....

All things are an exchange for Fire, and Fire for all things, even as wares for gold and gold for wares.

Fire lives the death of air, and air lives the death of fire; water lives the death of earth, earth that of water.

How can one hide from that which never sets?

It is the thunderbolt that steers the course of all things.

The sun is new every day.

God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, surfeit and hunger; but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savour of each.

If all things were turned to smoke, the nostrils would distinguish them.

Cold things become warm, and what is warm cools; what is wet dries, and the parched is moistened.

It scatters and it gathers; it advances and retires.

You cannot step twice into the same rivers; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you.

Homer was wrong in saying: "Would that strife might perish from among gods and men!" He did not see that he was praying for the destruction of the universe; for, if his prayer were heard, all things would pass away....

War is the father of all and the king of all; and some he has made gods and some men, some bond and some free.

Men do not know how what is at variance agrees with itself. It is an attunement of opposite tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.

It is the opposite which is good for us.

The hidden attunement is better than the open.

Let us not conjecture at random about the greatest things.

Men that love wisdom must be acquainted with very many things indeed.

The sea is the purest and the impurest water. Fish can drink it, and it is good for them; to men it is undrinkable and destructive.

Good and ill are one.

Couples are things whole and things not whole, what is drawn together and what is drawn asunder, the harmonious and the discordant. The one is made up of all things, and all things issue from the one.

To God all things are fair and good and right, but men hold some things wrong and some right.

We must know that war is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being and pass away through strife.

The wise is one only. It is unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus.

The bow (bíós) is called life (bíós), but its work is death.

Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life.

The way up and the way down is one and the same.

In the circumference of a circle the beginning and end are common.

You will not find the boundaries of soul by travelling in any direction, so deep is the measure of it.

And it is the same thing in us that is quick and dead, awake and asleep, young and old; the former are shifted and become the latter, and the latter in turn are shifted and become the former.

I have sought for myself.

We step and do not step into the same rivers; we are and are not.

It rests by changing.

Thought is common to all.

Those who speak with understanding must hold fast to what is common to all as a city holds fast to its law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are fed by the one divine law. It prevails as much as it will, and suffices for all things with something to spare.

So we must follow the common, yet though my Word is common, the many live as if they had a wisdom of their own.

They are estranged from that with which they have most constant intercourse.

The waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside each into a world of his own.

The way of man has no wisdom, but that of God has.

Man is called a baby by God, even as a child by a man.

The wisest man is an ape compared to God, just as the most beautiful ape is ugly compared to man.

The people must fight for its law as for its walls.

Wantonness needs putting out, even more than a house on fire.

It is not good for men to get all they wish to get. It is sickness that makes health pleasant; evil, good; hunger, plenty; weariness, rest.

It is hard to fight with one's heart's desire. Whatever it wishes to get, it purchases at the cost of soul.

For what thought or wisdom have they? They follow the poets and take the crowd as their teacher, knowing not that there are many bad and few good. For even the best of them choose one thing above all others, immortal glory among mortals, while most of them are gluttoned like beasts.

One is ten thousand to me, if he be the best.

The fool is fluttered at every word.

Homer should be turned out of the lists and whipped, and Archilochus likewise.

Man's character is his fate.

The mysteries practised among men are unholy mysteries.

And they pray to these images, as if one were to talk with a man's house, knowing not what gods or heroes are.