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### Sagacious Fire: The Lightning Thought of Heraclitus, Heidegger and Fink

There are many ways of thinking about the issue in Fragment (Fr.) 64 of Heraclitus' *On Nature*, which reads, "τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός – Lightning steers the universe" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 04). With these words as a guide, Eugen Fink and Martin Heidegger launched the seminal Heraclitus Seminar in the Winter Semester of 1966/67 at the University of Freiburg at Breisgau. The initial conversation concentrates on an interpretation of the words *tà pánta* (*τὰ πάντα*), which Diels translates as "the universe."<sup>1</sup> Fink is preliminarily concerned whether the word *tà pánta* (*τὰ πάντα*) is given a fitting translation by the word "universe." Indeed, Philip Wheelwright's translation of Fr. 64 reads, "The thunderbolt pilots all things" (Wheelright 1985: 72). This translation, more familiar to most English speakers, translates *tà pánta* (*τὰ πάντα*) as "all things." Thus, the translations give alternative versions of the same Greek words: "lightning" and "thunderbolt," "steers" and "pilots," "the universe" and "all things." The force of this translational difference could not have been of more profound significance for the rest of the seminar. When coupled with Fr. 41, "εἷναι γὰρ ἐν τῷ σοφόν, ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην, ὅτεν ἐκισβέρονσε πάντα διὰ πάντων – The wise is one thing only, to understand the thoughts that steer everything through everything," we get the contrast of *εἷν*, "the one," with *τὰ πάντα*, "the many things" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 06). Thus, much of the discussion throughout the several months of the Heraclitus Seminar concentrates on the distinction between the one and the many. This is of great philosophical import, without question, however, the course of this discussion will be guided by two other words which appear in the fragments and have close association: *οἰακίζει* ("pilots" in Wheelright; "steers" according to Diels) and *ἐκισβέρον* (translated as "steers" by both Wheelright and Diels). Heraclitus reveals that lightning steers the universe and that wisdom allows us to understand that thought steers everything. By dwelling for a time on Heraclitus' understanding of the transforming fire, *πύρος τροπαί*, that guides all things, we ourselves will be steered toward an open understanding of how the focusing on what-is-not-yet-familiar to us itself steers our thinking. My interest in this discussion is the import of the guiding relationship that the steering imposes on the development of understanding, thought, and meaning.

Before we begin to allow the meaning of the steering engaged in lightning and wisdom in this ancient sense to emerge, it is instructive to place ourselves in the context within which the Heraclitus Seminar was conducted. The participants in the seminar tried themselves to recall the context of Heraclitus' thinking. Which is to say, then, that an attempt to give an interpretive understanding of how Heraclitus viewed himself standing before the *λόγος* came to the fore. This is of course a difficult project, perhaps made more difficult if we follow Heidegger's lead to "seek the determination of the matter of thinking a conversation with Heraclitus" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 75). A profound complication looms before us in that the discussion emerges as a representation of the juxtaposition of *εἷν*, "the one," and *τὰ πάντα*, "the many," as filtered through, "The kind of thinking that thinks what is as a whole in regard to being" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 75). Said another way, Heidegger suggests that, since Plato and Aristotle, the whole history of western thought has been stamped with the imprint of metaphysical thinking. Heraclitus, according to Heidegger, is a pre-metaphysical thinker. Though he may have been preparing the ground, Heraclitus is himself a "not-yet-metaphysical" thinker. Heidegger claims, in fact, that, "... Heraclitus does not yet think metaphysically" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 75). Additionally, among Heidegger's projects is the freeing of the tradition from what he considers to be the shackles of metaphysical thinking, a "no-longer-metaphysical" thinking. Heidegger's hermeneutic thus attempts to engage that which has been left unthought or unsaid by the tradition. Our problem is deepened by the 2500 years of intervening metaphysical thinking that impresses itself on our thought at the moment that we attempt to shed the stamp. It is important to keep in mind that to say that something has been unsaid by the tradition is not to say that the unsaid is *unsayable*. Thus, this project is a thinking engaged in the non-metaphysical thought of thought about thinking.

It does not take long for Fink and Heidegger to stir into this witches brew the important words of Fr. 1: "γινομένων γὰρ πάντων – for although everything happens according to this *λόγος*" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 07). The *λόγος* is a complicated concept, and what it might mean here for Heraclitus is problematic in light of his pre- or not-yet-metaphysical thinking. *Λόγος* can be variously translated as "reason," "speech," or "word." Fink indicates that in Heraclitus' thought words like "Lightning, fire, sun, war, *λόγος*, and *σοφον* are different lines of thinking on one and the same ground. In *πύρος τροπαί*, transforming fire, everything is thought" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 10). However, it does not require much of an imaginative leap to conceive that if everything happens according to the *λόγος* (still problematic in *our* interpretive effort), then *λόγος* guides or steers

the many things that populate the *τὰ πάντα*. The participants of the Heraclitus Seminar seek a non-metaphysical understanding of that which itself is the *πῦρος τροπαί*, the transforming fire of lightning, fire, *λόγος*, *σοφόν*, etc. Thus, Heidegger and Fink find themselves led by the that-which-is-not-yet-known. It is also telling that the various metaphorical instantiations Heraclitus engages in his telling of the *λόγος*, and what steers the *λόγος*, show Heraclitus himself trying to think that which had not yet been thought. Alternately, we might say that Heraclitus seeks that which steers the steering and the steered. We find, however, that difficulties are amplified by trying to interpret what it might mean for something to steer that which steers! Heidegger articulates this problem, claiming, "Rather, the difficulty is that here is obviously a matter of a kind of thinking that lets itself into something that is inaccessible to direct representation and thought" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 75).

If we return to Fr. 64, we read that "Lightning steers the universe." We can question, along with Heidegger, how it is that lightning steers anything, let alone the universe. Eugen Fink, who takes many imaginative flights in his interpretive efforts, claims that the lightning flash metaphorically suggests that that which has been concealed becomes illuminated in that momentary shimmering of the lightning flash. That which has lain in the dark background comes to the fore in a nearly blinding instant. Something appears that has henceforth remained concealed. Like lightning on a dark night, individual things become illuminated by that which brings them to appearance. Or, as Fink says, "The entry of entities in their determinateness is thought in the moment of brightness," which he also says is a steering intervention, "in the moving of things themselves. Things are moved in the manner of advancing and receding, waxing and waning, of local movement and alteration" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 09). Fink associates this movement of lightning with the moving of *ἐν τῷ σοφόν*, that which steers the one of wisdom; and he additionally discriminates the sense of this steering as the efficacy of the lightning and *ἐν τῷ σοφόν*. This is not inconsistent with Wheelright's suggestion that Fr. 64 when compared with Fr. 41, "strongly suggests that the ideas of fire and intelligence were, to Heraclitus' mind, interchangeable or at any rate closely related and mutually coalescent" (Wheelright 1964: 41).<sup>2</sup> This steering has the impact which effects the bringing-forth-to-appearance and continues to effect things. Fink maintains that the lightning which rends open the dark of the night in its movement passes its movement into the movement of things as well. Thus, the steering, as an association of fire and intelligence, is not just a steering, but an active steerer as well, a pilot.

When the discussion takes up this aspect of the steering as pilot, an anthropomorphic element is added. It is concluded that the steering is not moved or a moving the way that entities are moved, but rather, that which brings forth the movement in entities. This steering is the movement which lies behind the possibility of movement. When related to *τὰ πάντα*, "the many," Fink maintains that it is the movement of the quintessential whole of entities. Regarding merely the phenomenon of steering itself, the phenomena here regarded as that which immediately is a source of our experience, Fink offers that steering in our phenomenal world is like "... the movement of a human who, for example, brings a ship into a desired course. It is the directing of movement which a rational human pursues" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 11). Further advancing the analogy with the steering of the ship, Fink says this effort is the bringing into control [*In-die Gewalt-Bringen*] of a movement. A rudderless ship without a pilot is subject to the arbitrariness of the forces of the wind and the water. When a pilot steers there is an active intervening, "a transfiguring movement that compels the ship along a specific course. It has the character of violence itself" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 12). Fink maintains that the phenomenon of human steering is a coercive, precalculated regulation of a calculative knowledge and coercive intervention. "The steering of Zeus is something else," he further maintains; "When he steers he does not calculate, but he rules effortlessly. There tends to be non-coercive steering in the region of the gods, but not in the human region" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 12).

Heidegger seems particularly concerned with non-coercive steering. Heidegger brings forth the issue of cybernetics asking whether in cybernetics there is a non-coercive steering. Geneticists tell us that there is, after all, a set of alphabet patterns, the patterns of which are an informational code. Thus, a human being is informed without consent. The in-forming is already part of the constitution of a human being. In genes, Fink asserts, there is a determinate stamping, a lasting stock. Information or informing thus takes on a dual character. There is information giving and a stamping.

There is another kind of stamping or interpretation that can be given to coercive steering. This kind of informing is illuminated by Fr. 11 "πάν γὰρ ἔρπετον πληγῇ νέμεται – Everything that crawls is tended to pasture or is driven by a blow" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 31). There is considerable discussion as to the nature of who or what is doing the driving. It is evident here that the violent nature of a steering or guiding emerges. Heidegger and Fink seem to disagree whether the driver (or steerer) in this instance is of divine origin. Wheelright suggests that in some instances there are those who understand the "blow in question to mean a divine blow that goads the animal from within, rather than the blow of a whip from the

outside.” Fink suggests that the animal in question is an animal of the pasture, and thus a shepherd is intended, but metaphorical emanations abound. The human condition as both driver and driven reveals itself.

An equally fruitful discussion emerges in an exposition of the word *νεμεται*, “to drive,” indicated in the discussion as being related to *Νέμεσις*, “the goddess of retribution,” and *νόμος*, which is “custom” or “law.” Thus, many interpretive nuances attend the meaning of the *νεμεται*: “guiding,” “pursuing,” and the “steering” of the blow and of being driven. A still more resonant sense of this element of *νεμεται* involves the aspect of tending and being steered. Heidegger indicates that tending is a driving as well as a leading, and this is the potent element of *νεμεται* in this context. When this is conjoined and put into play with an association with *Νέμεσις*, we appropriate an understanding of the power that allots and fatefully determines. The sense of the fragment no longer pertains merely to the context of a shepherd and a driven pasture animal, but that element presents itself which allots and dispenses for the *κόσμο* as well. “[T]he law,” *νόμος*, also simultaneously channels as it frees.

After a lengthy discussion and several sessions on the dawn, the intertwining of life and death (both in regard to humans and the gods), the mortal and the immortal, the discussion turns to the “locality of human beings between the light and night,” which has many resonant possibilities in a discussion of the relation of steering and meaning. Fink illustrates that a human being is not like other beings living *between* the light and the night. Human beings stand in a relationship *to* the night and the light. Fr. 26 reads “ἄνθρωπος ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φάος ἄπτεται ἐαταυτῷ (ἀροθανῶν ἀποσβεσθεῖς ὄψεις, ζῶν δὲ ἄπτεται τεθνεῶτος ἔυδων, (ἀποσβετεῖς ὄψεις) ἐγγρηγορῶς ἄπτεται εὐδοντος – “A human touches on (kindles) a light in the night, when his eyesight is extinguished. Living, he touches on death in sleep: in waking he touches on sleeping” (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 120). When the *ὄψεις*, “eyesight,” is extinguished, a human being has the capacity to kindle a fire in the night to bring forth the light. What emerges in this discussion is that a human being stands in a darkness and has the capacity to kindle and bring forth the light for himself. The darkness is likened to an openness for Heidegger in so far as a light is kindled in it. The darkness is open to the possibility that a light or fire can be ignited in it. Fink summarizes the matter thus:

Somebody kindles a torch in the night. It casts its shine on the way, so that one can orient oneself on the way. In that he moves in brightness, and relates himself to it, he relates himself at the same time to the menacing darkness, for

which he is understandingly open even though not in the manner of standing open. The clearing in the concealing darkness has limitation: *ἀλήθεια* [non-concealment] is surrounded by *λήθη* [concealment]. (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 131)

Fink also offers the following:

A human is the twilight, fire-kindling being in the counterplay of day and night. It is the basic situation of humans to be placed in an extraordinary manner in the counterplay of day and night. A human does not come forth like the other living beings in this counterplay; rather, he comports himself toward it, is near fire and related to *σῶθον*. (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 133).

As this final piece slips into place, the circle of hermeneutic understanding completes the circuit of how steering takes its place in meaning.

This paper is not an attempt to unfold before discerning thinkers the correct place and interpretation of the fragments remaining to us of the thought of Heraclitus. It is fitting that Heraclitus, in his day, was referred to as the “dark” one. In many ways he remains dark, but his darkness opens a thinking possibility for us, and this situates the tendency of this paper. His appellation offers a fitting metaphor for the spot from which we strike out. We, like the dark one, find ourselves in dark environs. The human condition is such that we are cast into the darkness. We are situated in such a way that there is much that is dark for us. We are comported in such a manner to the darkness that we desire to strike a light into that obscurity. The Heraclitus Seminar sheds a light on how it is we that we try to push back the encroachment of the darkness. We are so constituted that we seek to find answers in and to solve that which is dark, in this instance the dark thought of Heraclitus, Heidegger, and Fink. It is evident that if all were light, one would not seek answers. One does not try to state that for which one has no need. Thought seeks to find an explanation, and Heraclitus’ *λόγος* calls to us. *Λόγος* has many meanings: “sentence,” “discourse,” “story,” “reason,” “ratio,” “rule,” “rational principle,” “the word,” “definition.” Thinking seeks to find its way out of the darkness by lighting a fire for itself in the night. The Heraclitus Seminar acts as the ember which ignites our thinking on this topic. The spark of this flame is contained in the words we speak to ourselves.

Once we ignite the fire of this discussion, or kindle the torch in the dark of the night, the light which emanates from the discussion illuminates other aspects and brings them to the fore, so that we can orient ourselves in the fire-light of the discussion. The light shows us a path whereby we might be guided. As various elements of the discussion heighten our acuity, we find ourselves open to still more elements of that which can be understood. We relate ourselves to the understandings that emerge into the open for us, aware nevertheless of the vast ocean of that which remains dim to us, remembering, as though as an echo, Fink's words, "The clearing in the concealing darkness has limitation: ἀλγθεια [non-concealment] is surrounded by λγθη [concealment]."

The revealing into the open of that which has remained concealed inclines us toward that which can be further revealed. In this movement we are tended. "Tended" here gathers the dual aspect of inclination and care. We ourselves intend because we care. This inclination drives us, as though by a blow. We are simultaneously driven and drawn toward that which remains undefined by us in its very nature. We are guided in our pursuit of that which recedes from us. Drawn and coerced, there is a violence done to the darkness.

This pursuit leaves its mark on us. We are stamped with the imprint of our search. Thus, we are in-formed about that which we seek. The informing is already part of the constitution of a human being, takes up the dual character of both informing and stamping simultaneously. As we transform the course toward which we are steered, we are transported in a transfiguring manner, compelling us in a specific course. The specific and compelling course of this discussion, effulgent, rich, and fecund, is to interpret what Heraclitus thought when he thought "steering," the steering which brings forth the movement in entities, the movement which lies behind the possibility of movement. What we have had revealed here is the directing of movement which a rational human pursues.

By casting before ourselves a project for our thinking, we circumscribe our search and bring into control a movement of our thought. We give rudder and direction to our thinking, piloting us through the perils of Scylla and Charybdis, of arbitrariness and caprice, of wind and water. By actively intervening, by piloting actively the activity of our thought we channel our thinking into defined channels. Thus, as indicated earlier in our essay, the phenomenon of human steering is a coercive, precalculated regulation of a calculative knowledge and coercive intervention.

In this discourse, by opening our conversation with Heraclitus, Heidegger, and Fink, we opened a conversation with ourselves. We speak to ourselves in ways which guide us, but in ways that are not always clear to

us. In pursuing topics for thinking, we are often guided by the that-which-is-not-yet-known. We guide ourselves and steer ourselves in a course which is a making familiar of our selves to ourselves, and thereby toward others. However, by shining forth a light for ourselves, there is still much that remains dark for us. We remain dark for ourselves. We comport ourselves in an open way to the darkness and integrate with it. As Heidegger maintains, ". . . a continuous bringing-toward-one-another. Thinking in Greek, we can say that everything plays here in nonconcealment and concealing. We must also see that from the beginning" (Heidegger and Fink 1979: 136).

### Notes

1. I am relying on the text of the Heraclitus seminar which translates the Greek following Diels-Kranz (see Fitt 1957). Additionally, to avoid confusion, I am following the fragment numbers as assigned by Diels-Kranz in 1934. Philip Wheelwright gives a concordance of the fragments according to Diels-Kranz, Bywater, and himself, at Wheelwright 1964: 112.

2. He further indicates this was the view by held later interpreters, citing Hippolytus as an example.

### References

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